On Buddha Essence

A Commentary on Rangjung Dorje's Treatise

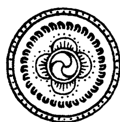


Khenchen Thrangu

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Translated by Peter Alan Roberts
EDITED BY CLARK JOHNSON



SHAMBHALA • *Boston & London* • 2006

Shambhala Publications, Inc.
Horticultural Hall
300 Massachusetts Avenue
Boston, Massachusetts 02115
www.shambhala.com

9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

First Edition

Printed in the United States of America

♾This edition is printed on acid-free paper that meets the American National Standards Institute z39.48 Standard.
Distributed in the United States by Random House, Inc., and in Canada by Random House of Canada Ltd

Designed by Lora Zorian

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Thrangu, Rinpoche, 1933–
On Buddha essence: a commentary on Rangjung Dorje's treatise/Khenchen Thrangu; translated by Peter Alan Roberts; edited by Clark Johnson.
p. cm.
Translation from Tibetan.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN-13: 978-1-59030-276-7 (alk. paper)
ISBN-10: 1-59030-276-1
1. Ran-byun-rdo-rje, Karma-pa III, 1284–1339.
De bzin gsegs pa'i sin po bstan pa'i bstan bcos.
2. Tathagatagarbha (Buddhism) 3. Kar-ma-pa (Sect)—Doctrines.
4. Mahayana Buddhism—Doctrines. I. Roberts, Peter Alan, 1952–
II. Johnson, Clark. III. Title.
BQ4450.R363T47 2006
294.3'42042—dc22
2006000177

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TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

THIS BOOK IS EDITED from talks given by Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche at the Sopa Chöling Retreat Center at Gampo Abbey in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia. Founded by Trungpa Rinpoche in 1984, Gampo Abbey is situated on a cliff top overlooking a wide vista of sea, which even in April can be covered in ice to the horizon. However, this was the summer, so through the large windows I could see schools of pilot whales appearing through the sea's surface. At Trungpa Rinpoche's request, Thrangu Rinpoche has been the abbot of Gampo Abbey since its establishment. Farther along the cliff from the monastic community of the abbey is Sopa Chöling, its three-year retreat center. Apart from the view, the retreat has the distinctive qualities of being practiced entirely in English and episodically.

The program for that particular year began with Thrangu Rinpoche teaching Rangjung Dorje's text on buddha nature. Rinpoche has taught Rangjung Dorje's *Treatise on Buddha Nature* a number of times. It is one of the Kagyu school's older and more important texts, particularly as Jamgön Kongtrul composed a commentary to it in the nineteenth century, which Thrangu Rinpoche uses as the basis for his teachings.

SOME HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Buddha's lifetime, now believed to be entirely within the fifth century B.C.E. (something like 490–410), preceded the introduction into Indian culture of such elements as writing or the Greek theory of atoms (created by the Buddha's contemporary Democritus) or the rival theory of the four elements of earth, fire, air, and water

(formulated by Empedocles, another Greek contemporary), which would become so central to later Buddhism.

The Abhidharma tradition was particularly addressed to filling in the gaps in a complete world picture that purely sutra readings alone would leave. This involved the geography and constituents not only of the outside world but also of the mind. One central problem was how to combine the denial of an underlying atman, or Self (which even in other religions of India did not refer to the ever-changing, perceivable self of an individual but was an unchanging, unperceived basis for the daily fluctuations of the perceivable mind) with the continuum of an individual. For though one moment of consciousness is said to give rise to the following moment, what could explain the reappearance of consciousness after its interruption by deep sleep or unconsciousness, and also from one life to the next? How to explain this without being open to the criticism of presenting an atman under another name?

Buddhism had divided into many different schools in the centuries after the Buddha's death, and some of their differences were doctrinal. There were therefore different solutions to this dilemma, such as the five Pudgalavadin traditions that stated that there was an individual self. The Mahasanghika tradition had the concept of a "root consciousness," or *mulavijñana*, as a basis for the generally accepted six consciousnesses. The Mahasanghika tradition is important in the history of Buddhism, as it also viewed the Buddha as a transcendent being and delineated a passage to Buddhahood through ten levels, or bhumis, of a bodhisattva, which would reappear, much transformed, within the Mahayana tradition.

The Mahayana was not a tradition that appeared outside these by-then ancient traditions of Buddhism, but were sutras that appeared within these traditions at the beginning of the first millennium B.C.E. There were therefore Mahayana Sarvastivadins and Mahayana (and even Vajrayana) Theravadins.

Some of the Mahayana sutras themselves describe the process of revelation by which these sutras appeared, or even encourage seeking them through meditation. The earliest tradition of Buddhism had been an oral transmission. The first instance of its being written

down is now believed to be around 200 B.C.E. in Afghanistan, these original manuscripts having astonishingly survived in earthenware jars until their discovery just a few years ago. The first known use of a written script in India appears during King Ashoka's reign (270–232 B.C.E.), and by the time of the appearance of the Mahayana sutras, written texts were an invaluable part of the Buddhist tradition.

The Mahayana sutras have a different literary style from the earlier orally transmitted sutras, as they began their existence as the written word and often exhorted a practice of devotion to the texts themselves. As some sutras acquired extra chapters over time, their whole does not necessarily date from the same century.

Some of the earliest of these sutras are the Manjushri sutras and some of the Perfection of Wisdom sutras, which deal with emptiness, and also such devotion-based sutras as the *Sukhavati Sutra,* for rebirth in the buddha realm of Amitabha. The sutras that introduce the concept of buddha nature, or *tathagatagarbha,* seem to have come after the lifetime of Nagarjuna, the commentator on the earliest Mahayana sutras, who may have lived in the second century C.E.

The Sanskrit term *tathagatagarbha* is now firmly entrenched in English as "buddha nature," just as *deshek nyingpo* (bde-gshegs snying-po) is used in Tibetan, even though neither fully reflects the original multivalent word, which itself is difficult to pin down, as the meaning can vary according to context. It is at its clearest when used as what is called a bahuvrihi compound; the name for this kind of compound is also an example of it: "much-rice," referring to a place or country that has plenty of rice. In a sentence where beings are said to be tathagatagarbha, it is clear that beings are "tathagata-containing," or, in other words, that all beings have a tathagata, or buddha, within them. *Garbha* is regularly used as the second half of a compound for all sorts of mundane terms to mean "containing." However, in those passages where *tathagatagarbha* does not refer to beings but to that which is within them, the meaning of *garbha* becomes more ambiguous and can mean "womb," "embryo," or "seed," with the resultant varying meanings of being able "to give birth" to Buddhahood, or having a not yet fully developed Buddhahood within them. The Tibetan, while retaining *tathagata,* has interpreted

garbha as "essence" (snying-po), the innermost part of something, and it is used in that way, for example, to refer to a temple's innermost shrine room. English has used the more user-friendly *buddha* rather than *tathagata* and the more abstract but perhaps more apt *nature,* so that it is not that we have the essence or the embryo of Buddhahood within our natures, but that our very nature is Buddhahood, which conforms pleasantly with the contemporary Vajrayana perspective.

The *Tathagathagarbha Sutra,* considered to be the earliest that addresses this subject, contained the nine examples for the presence of the buddha nature of beings, which have reappeared in most teachings on the subject. There followed other sutras, such as the *Sutra of Queen Mala,* and the now lost *Mahayana Abhidharma Sutra,* a quotation of which survived in the original *Uttaratantra* commentary and was therefore also used by Rangjung Dorje in his own text. However, the most important work for Tibetan Buddhism is a commentary that included within itself about two centuries of canonical development: the *Uttaratantra.* This text, however, either predates or ignores the teachings of the *Lankavatara Sutra* (possibly fourth century), which presents the principal tenets of the Yogacharin, or Chittamatra (Mind Only), tradition, which was founded in the fourth century.

Who was the author of this book that is now of such central importance to the Kagyu tradition? In Tibet it is said to be one of "the five works of Maitreya," meaning the bodhisattva in the Tushita paradise who will be the next buddha when the life span of humans has again risen back to twenty thousand years. However, the canon (ignoring variant prose and verse translations of the same text) attributes six works to him. The sixth, usually unmentioned, work is the *Bhavasamkranti-tika,* which is a short commentary on the *Bhavasamkranti* of Nagarjuna. The full name of the *Uttaratantra,* which was not translated into Tibetan, includes what is the main part of its title *Ratnagotravibhaga,* "Differentiating between the Jewels and the Gotra." *Gotra,* literally meaning "family," is here used as a term for buddha nature. Though Tibetan legend has Asanga writing the commentary and concealing the text, which lay undiscovered

until the eleventh-century Mahamudra master Maitripa, it was evidently in circulation in India and China, though in India it never attained the importance it was to have in Tibet.

The origins of this important text are therefore mysterious, but it becomes of great importance to Tibetan Buddhism following its eleventh-century translations in Kashmir by Tsen Khawoche and especially Ngok Loden Sherab (1059–1109).

RANGJUNG DORJE

The Third Karmapa Rangjung Dorje (1284–1339) was the son of a lama in the lineage of Padampa Sangye in western Tibet. When he was about five he was brought to meet Ugyenpa, the principal pupil of the Second Karmapa. Ugyenpa clairvoyantly recognized him to be the rebirth of the Karmapa (at this time the tradition of a prediction letter and a search party for a rebirth had not yet formed) and gave him all the necessary abhishekas. Then up until the age of seventeen he received all the principal Kagyu teachings, particularly from Nyenre Gendun Bum at Tshurpu. He then studied many texts, such as the five works of Maitreya, including the *Uttaratantra*, from Shakya Shonnu at Sangphu Monastery, which had been founded by Ngok Loden Sherab, the translator of the *Uttaratantra*.

After a visit to Kham, he received the teachings of the Kalachakra and other tantras and established a number of retreat centers. In 1313, when he was twenty-nine, he discovered Dzogchen Khandro Nyingthig terma at Lhodrak and entered a three-month retreat in order to receive its transmission directly from Guru Rinpoche. In 1320, when he was thirty-six, he gave the transmission of empowerments and instructions to his principal pupils at Dechen Teng, a retreat center that he had founded at Tsurphu. In 1326, aged forty-two, he went to Lhasa and then to Kham, teaching extensively there and returning to central Tibet in 1328. In 1331 he left for the new Chinese emperor Togon Temur's capital, where he gave empowerments to the emperor and his queen. He returned to Tibet in 1334, and then back again to China in 1337, where he passed away in 1339, aged only fifty-five. Famously, people saw his entire body within the next full moon.

He left behind one of the most important legacies of literature in the Karma Kagyu tradition, including such works as *The Profound Inner Meaning*, *The Mahamudra Prayer*, *Distinguishing Consciousness from Wisdom*, and *The Instructions on Sahajayoga Mahamudra*. Among his collected works is the short text *A Treatise on Buddha Nature*, which was probably written in Dechen Teng in 1323, when he was thirty-nine. Most of his wide-ranging works, the result of his study and practice of a number of lineages, are still awaiting translation.

JAMGÖN KONGTRUL

The principal commentary to *A Treatise on Buddha Nature*, and that used by Thrangu Rinpoche for this teaching, is by Jamgön Kongtrul (1813–1899). Jamgön Kongtrul has had an immense impact upon the Kagyu literary tradition, as his compilations, commentaries, and sadhanas are so often used in teaching and practice. He was particularly exceptional, as his rise to such a position of authority in the Karma Kagyu school was not the result of being recognized as an incarnation while a child but was entirely through his own personal merits. He was also exceptional in writing a fairly candid autobiography. He was brought up as a Bön practitioner and then entered the Nyingma monastery of Shechen before transferring at the age of twenty, on his uncle's advice, to the Karma Kagyu monastery of Palpung, the seat of the Tai Situpas. With this background, he was from an early age nonsectarian and eager to study other lineages.

His brilliance as a scholar and writer resulted in the fear that he might be requisitioned by secular authorities, and so at the age of twenty he was given the spurious identification as the incarnation of Kongpo Trulku, and thus his title of Kongtrul. Nevertheless, he was later recognized by a number of lamas as having had many prestigious previous lives. He took dreams and omens very seriously and kept a dream diary until he was twenty-five. External, physical, or mental disturbances he would decipher as the result of some malign, demonic influence. His was not an entirely trouble-free life. Apart from being afflicted by various bouts of illnesses, when he was twenty-four a disaffected former member of Palpung planned to have him killed while

traveling as a representative of Palpung, but he managed to avoid that fate and was eventually able to settle the dispute.

Kongtrul complains that he lost much of the clarity and perspicacity of his younger mind, which he blamed upon all the ceremonies and prayers that he had to perform for others, and for which he was given offerings. This was a duty that took up much of his time throughout his life. Nevertheless, he still managed to spend part of each year in retreat, practicing the many teachings that he received in the retreat center he had established above Palpung when he was forty. A major factor in his life was becoming the pupil of the Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo, who encouraged and instructed him to produce his works, including the huge compilation of terma texts, for which a few months are required to transmit the empowerments and transmissions. He also made a close connection with the first Choling Rinpoche, who recognized his retreat area as a sacred site.

It was in 1870 that the fifty-seven-year-old Jamgön Kongtrul composed his commentary to Rangjung Dorje's *Treatise on Buddha Nature* as well as his *Distinguishing Consciousness from Wisdom.* Unfortunately, a few years later, in 1873, a Kushap Rinpoche and other monks at Palpung published a list of scathing accusations against him and Ongen Rinpoche, one of Palpung's senior tulkus. Kongtrul does not state what they were, but when the government stepped in, most were found false, and the accusing monks were imprisoned, but Ongen Rinpoche was banished and Kongtrul confined for a while to his retreat. He says he decided not to enter Palpung again and did not do so for fourteen years, though he does describe performing rites at the protector temple and suchlike during this period. It was right in the middle of all these problems that he published his huge *Treasury of Termas,* which form one of his "five treasures."

He continued his cycle of retreats, and giving empowerments and carrying out ceremonies through his later years, though he suffered bouts of ill health. At the age of eighty-one, he described himself as very ill and stated that the ceremonies being practiced to try to heal him were of no avail. Nevertheless, he lived another five years, though his health continued to deteriorate, until he peacefully passed

away in 1899 at the age of eighty-six. He had not only passed on the empowerments and transmissions to the Fifteenth Karmapa, but left behind an astonishingly unique heritage of transmissions for practitioners, of which this teaching given by Thrangu Rinpoche is a very small part.

KHENCHEN THRANGU RINPOCHE

Like Jamgön Kongtrul, Thrangu Rinpoche has risen to his preeminent status within the Karma Kagyu because of the qualities of mind he has personally demonstrated. As a result of his powers of scholarship, on the advice of the Sixteenth Karmapa he obtained the highest degree within the Gelugpa tradition as well as within his own. Having had to flee Tibet in 1959 at the age of twenty-six, he at first settled with the Karmapa in Sikkim, where following the completion of his studies he become the senior scholar there and the tutor to the highest Kagyu tulkus. He reestablished Thrangu Monastery in Bodhnath, Nepal, in the seventies, and somehow, combined with traveling and teaching most of the year, he has been able to develop the monastery and establish a shedra, or monastic college, a nunnery, and a retreat center in Nepal, a school that serves the young monastics as well as the lay population, and one of the most impressive Tibetan monasteries in India at Sarnath. These are only some of the projects he is overseeing. In the West, he has established a retreat center in Crestone, Colorado, and is building a large monastery in Vancouver.

Although I am credited as the translator, the work that has gone into making what you read on these pages is primarily that of the editors, who have had to turn recordings of my interpreting into something readable. I have been translating for Rinpoche since 1984 and attending his teachings since 1979, when he first appeared in a Scottish summer at Samye Ling to do the first of a number of three-month courses, during one of which he went through the *Uttaratanta*, line by line.

In his steady, reliable, and clear teachings, Thrangu Rinpoche emphasizes bringing a text to life, so as to communicate the meaning

to a present-day audience. In spite of his great scholarship, his is not an academic approach, but every sentence is intended to be in some way useful or inspiring for practice. In particular, through the twenty years that I have had the opportunity to translate for him, as well as his kindness, patience, and humor, the clarity of his teaching is also accompanied by a gift to make the essence of the teaching alive and relevant to the audience. At least that's what I am lucky enough to hear. Hopefully, the reader will not find it too adulterated after having gone through my ear and out of my mouth.

PETER ALAN ROBERTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to thank the many persons who helped make this book possible. First of all, we would like to thank Peter Alan Roberts for not only translating these teachings, but also translating the root text. We would like to thank Gampo Abbey for publishing parts of this work in their *The Profound Path of Peace* (vol. XI) [Pleasant Bay, Nova Scotia: International Kagyu Sangha Association]. Finally, we would like to thank Migme Chödron for the immense work of transcribing and editing these teachings, and Jean Johnson for her editing on this book. We would also like to thank Tracy Davis for all her work in bringing forth this volume.

INTRODUCTION

THE KAGYU LINEAGE OF TIBETAN BUDDHISM, to which the teachings presented in this book belong, comprises two main sets of instructions. There is the line of teachings of the Six Yogas of Naropa, which comes from Tilopa to Naropa to Marpa, then on to Milarepa and Gampopa, and on to the First Karmapa. Then there is also the line of teachings that come from Saraha through Maitripa to Marpa and so on, which are the Mahamudra teachings. The most important teachings and practices in the Kagyu lineage are the Six Yogas of Naropa and the Mahamudra.

In the Kagyu school, primarily the Mahamudra teachings, as opposed to the Dzogchen teachings, are taught and practiced. The reason for this is that the Dzogchen teachings are practiced in the Nyingma school, so the Dzogchen lineage isn't going to come to an end if the Kagyu do not emphasize Dzogchen. If, however, the Kagyu lineage does not emphasize and practice the Mahamudra teachings, then the Mahamudra lineage could come to an end. That is why the Kagyu teachers primarily teach and practice Mahamudra: to ensure that the Mahamudra lineage will continue to exist. For example, there are the Six Yogas of Niguma, which are from the Shangpa Kagyu lineage.[1] Jamgön Kongtrul thought that the Shangpa Kagyu was very small and that the lineage would come to an end, so he brought the Six Yogas of Niguma into the Kagyu school. They are now taught and practiced within the Karma Kagyu school, and this prevents the lineage of the Six Yogas of Niguma from coming to an end. In that same way, if the Kagyu do not practice and teach Mahamudra, then that lineage could cease.

Naropa made a prophecy to Marpa that the pupils of his lineage—which was to become the Kagyu lineage—would be greater than their teachers. In the Kagyu lineage, the Second Karmapa Karma Pakshi had greater power and miraculous abilities than the First Karmapa Dusum Khyenpa. In essence they were the same, but it appeared that Karma Pakshi had greater power and greater miraculous abilities. In the same way, the Third Karmapa Rangjung Dorje had even greater abilities of learning and greater miraculous powers than the Second Karmapa.

There have been seventeen Karmapas, and among these the Third Karmapa Rangjung Dorje and the Eighth Karmapa Mikyo Dorje showed the greatest scholarship. Mikyo Dorje demonstrated a greater understanding of the Sutra teachings, whereas Rangjung Dorje had greater understanding of the Tantra teachings. Rangjung Dorje was a master of the Kalachakra teachings and had a particularly clear understanding of the subtle channels (Skt. *nadi*), the subtle winds (Skt. *vayu*), and the subtle drops (Skt. *bindu*) within the body. He also had full understanding of the meaning of these as taught in the tantras. With this understanding he composed the text called *The Profound Inner Meaning* based on the highest yoga tantras, the anuttarayoga tantras. The meaning of all these tantras is clearly taught in *The Profound Inner Meaning.*

Rangjung Dorje's understanding of the Kalachakra gave him a clear understanding of astrology, how the movements of the sun, moon, and stars affect the movements of the subtle winds and subtle drops within the body. He composed an astrology text showing the movements of the stars and the lunar constellations. This was basically the astrology of the Kalachakra, but it differed from the Kalachakra teachings that had previously been given in Tibet in that his texts were exceptionally clear and correct in terms of the movements of stars, the lunar and solar eclipses, and so on.

Rangjung Dorje also addressed the main practices of the Kagyu lineage—the Six Yogas of Naropa and Mahamudra meditation—saying that what would help an individual's practice of these is the study of three main texts: *The Profound Inner Meaning* (his own composition), the *Hevajra Tantra,* and the *Uttaratantra.* He also said that for

one's meditation of Mahamudra, it would be helpful to be able to distinguish between the eight consciousnesses and the five wisdoms. For this Rangjung Dorje wrote a short text entitled *Distinguishing Consciousness from Wisdom.* The root of the wisdom that arises in Mahamudra is buddha nature, or buddha essence, so Rangjung Dorje wrote *A Treatise on Buddha Nature,* which shows how buddha nature is present in all things. That text is the subject of this book. *Distinguishing Consciousness from Wisdom* and *A Treatise on Buddha Nature* are considered subsidiary or branch texts for *The Profound Inner Meaning.*

A Treatise on Buddha Nature essentially teaches the essence of the sugata, or the sugatagarbha, also called the tathagatagarbha, or the essence of the tathagata. *Sugata* means "gone to bliss," and what we need to do is to achieve this perfect bliss. The buddhas and bodhisattvas have been able to reach the level of perfect bliss, and we need to do the same. But to do this, we need to have someone who has achieved that level of ultimate, perfect bliss and has experienced the path that leads to that level, which means a sugata. And we need to follow that path with diligence until we have gone to bliss. Can we reach that state? Yes, we can because we possess the essence of the sugatas, the essence of the buddhas, and this essence is buddha nature.[2]

The word *sugata,* or "one who has gone to bliss," is a term having a provisional meaning,[3] in that the idea of bliss or a state of happiness seems to imply that if there is bliss then there must be suffering and pain. However, there is also the term *tathagata,* meaning "one who has gone thus," and this means that when the buddhas have gone to the state of bliss, they have manifested the essence within them that was already present. Therefore the term *tathagata* is used to show that they have manifested their true essence just as it is.

This true essence, the tathagatagarbha or buddha nature, is possessed not only by buddhas but by every being. However, the fact that we live within samsara means that we experience various kinds of suffering. We have to experience being born, growing old, becoming sick, and dying, and so we need to ultimately attain complete freedom from this suffering. The way to achieve this is to eliminate the faults that we have in our own minds. Having eliminated the defects

that are within us, we also need to develop all of our positive qualities. We do this through meditation; the way to achieve Buddhahood is to meditate. In the Buddhist tradition, this includes the instructions of Mahamudra and Dzogchen.

Jamgön Kongtrul said that when we meditate, we need to know the reasons for the meditation; that is, we have to have the view. If we meditate without knowing the reasons for meditation, it is like a person without any hands trying to climb a cliff. Someone who is a great scholar but doesn't meditate is like a rich person who is unwilling to spend money: he will be unable to gain any personal benefit from his wealth and won't be able to help anybody else with it either. In the same way, a great scholar who doesn't meditate is not able to gain any benefit from what he knows. So we need to understand the view, and we also need to practice. Jamgön Kongtrul said that understanding and meditating are like the two wings of a bird flying through the sky. A bird with the right wing of meditation and the left wing of understanding will be able to fly wherever it wants. If we know clearly how to meditate and what the result of the meditation is, then there will be no difficulty in doing the practice. For this reason, the text gives the teachings on buddha nature.

Buddhist scriptures are divided into sutra and shastra, and Rangjung Dorje's teaching on buddha nature is considered a shastra, or treatise. In general, the teachings of the Buddha are called the sutras, and they are considered very important, particularly in China; Chinese masters put great emphasis on them. There are also the shastras, or treatises by Buddhist masters, and in the Vajrayana tradition of Tibet, these shastras are considered very important. The masters who composed them were not writing anything different from what the Buddha taught. The Buddha would teach at a certain place to a certain individual who had asked him a question, and he would give an answer that would become the teaching. Then the Buddha would meet someone else at another place and give a teaching in answer to that person's question. These different subjects and teachings were not all gathered together in one place but were scattered throughout the various sutras, which made it very difficult to understand the whole. After the Buddha's passing away, great masters composed treatises that took

subject matter from many different sources within the different sutras and brought them together in one small work. In other words, the shastras concentrate all the Buddhist topics scattered throughout various sources. This is why the treatises are important.

The treatises are also important because they explain profound concepts. For some, knowing that this is what the Buddha said is enough to convince them that a particular teaching is correct. Others, however, are convinced of something the Buddha said only after they have questioned it. For example, the *Heart Sutra* says, "There are no eyes, no ears, no nose, no tongue," and so on. There are those who have complete conviction in this just because it was taught by the Buddha. But most of us want to know why the teaching says there are no eyes, no ears, no nose, and so forth, when clearly we have these. Great scholars in the past wrote shastras explaining logically why the Buddha said this, so that we could understand and gain faith in these teachings.

A third function of shastras is to eliminate any degradation in the teachings. This doesn't mean that the teachings themselves are declining or degenerating, but, having been passed on for so many generations, some sutras have been lost, so that there is a teaching only partially present in one sutra and nonexistent in the other sutras. To prevent any decline in the teachings, great masters wrote commentaries on the entire meaning of a particular teaching. So these are the purposes of the treatises and the reasons Rangjung Dorje wrote *A Treatise on Buddha Nature.*

There are many different kinds of treatises, and Jamgön Kongtrul divides them into nine categories grouped into three sets of three types of treatises. The first three types are meaningless treatises, the next three are those that present an incorrect meaning, and the last three are meaningful treatises. The first kind of treatise, a meaningless one, could be very long and go into a lot of detail on the subject, for example, of whether birds have teeth. One might do a lot of study on that subject, but in fact the point of whether or not a bird has teeth is not actually helpful in one's worldly life or one's practice. The second group is of treatises that are incorrect. For example, in India many shastras were written saying that if you die in battle, you will

attain liberation. In fact, if you were to die in battle, you would be dying in a state of anger, and anger is not going to benefit you. This is the kind of treatise that is incorrect. Third, the meaningful treatise is one that has a meaning, and if you want to study and practice it, it will be of benefit to you.

The second set of treatises includes those whose purpose is to deceive and those that are uncompassionate. An example of a deceptive treatise is found in the following story. Long ago in India there was a king who had a very beautiful daughter. She was so beautiful that the king wanted to marry her, but of course this would be very shameful. He decided that he would write a treatise to prove that nobody has rolled peas into their round shape, that they're just naturally round without any cause or reason for it; and that thorns are sharp and nobody made them like that, that's just the way they are for no reason or cause; and that a beautiful daughter also exists without any real reason or cause, she just naturally exists. What he was getting at was that if you marry your own daughter, it doesn't really make any difference. That was why he made up this theory in his text. This is an example of a text meant to deceive.

Another in this category is an uncompassionate text. For example, some time ago I went to the Guru Rinpoche cave at Maratika in Nepal, where a number of Hindu sadhus were burning a huge log and sitting right next to it. I wondered why they were sitting there getting burned and breathing in all the smoke. They said it was to practice asceticism, as their Hindu religion taught. But this teaching is uncompassionate because it just creates suffering for oneself and doesn't do anyone else any good. This would be an example of a heartless, uncompassionate treatise.

The third type of treatise is one that eliminates suffering. This is the kind of treatise that eliminates both worldly suffering and also leads to ultimate liberation from suffering. We need to study this third kind of treatise. The treatises that are beneficial may be divided into three different types: those devoted to learning, those devoted to debate, and those devoted to practice. Among this group, the first type of text is devoted to learning and gaining an understanding about a Buddhist topic. The second type is devoted to how to prac-

tice debate, how to win in debate, and how to refute the other person's propositions. These two types of texts have temporary benefit but no real lasting benefit. The final type of treatise brings lasting benefit so that one can gain a real result from one's practice.

OUTLINE OF THE TEXT

I. The title
II. The homage (line 1)
III. The brief presentation of the teaching through the scriptures
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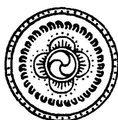
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1

THE BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE TREATISE



THE TRADITION of writing treatises originated in India. The authors of these shastras would summarize the different points in their treatise. But in Tibet, those who wrote commentaries started a new tradition in which an explanation of the text is given in the form of a textual outline. For example, they would begin a treatise by saying that this particular text could be divided into five sections, and the first section itself can be divided into three parts, and so on.

A Treatise on Buddha Nature can be divided into five main sections: (1) the title; (2) the homage; (3) a brief presentation of the subject matter, consisting of quotations from three scriptures; (4) a detailed explanation of the subject matter, which has five major parts and is the major portion of the text (210 lines of the total 231 lines); and (5) the conclusion.

The meditation instructions of Mahamudra and the Six Yogas of Naropa can be traced to Rangjung Dorje, the Third Karmapa. It is said that the Dzogchen instructions come from Jigme Lingpa and his nyingthig teachings. Where did Jigme Lingpa get his teachings? These were derived from the *Longchen Nyingthig,* which was written by Longchenpa. Where did Longchenpa get his instructions? He received his instructions from Rangjung Dorje. So we can say that Rangjung Dorje is the source for both the Mahamudra and Dzogchen teachings. In his two shorter branch texts (*Distinguishing*

Consciousness from Wisdom and *A Treatise on Buddha Nature*), Rangjung Dorje says that whether one does Mahamudra or Dzogchen practice, buddha nature is the foundation from which both of these meditations develop.

I. THE TITLE

The title of this work is *Dezhin shekpa'i nyingpo tenpa'i tenchö*, or the *Nyingpo Tenpa* for short. This may be translated as *A Treatise on a Teaching on the Tathagatagarbha* or, if we want to use all English, *A Treatise on Buddha Nature.* The Tibetan word *tenpa* means "a teaching on," and the Tibetan *nyingpo* (the Sanskrit *garbha*) means "nature" or "essence."

The title of this text contains the word *tathagata*, which is a name for the buddhas. When it says *tathagatagarbha*, or "essence of the tathagatas," it means that we have within ourselves this essence of the buddhas, an essence that enables us to become a buddha. Although *tathagata* usually means "thus having gone" just as the previous buddhas went, in Jamgön Kongtrul's commentary it is glossed as "those who have realized the tathagata or the true nature of mind as it is."

The true nature of the mind is sometimes called Mahamudra and sometimes Dzogchen. Mahasiddhas have explained it in a way that is easier to understand: the nature of mind is the natural or ordinary mind (Tib. *thamal gyi shepa*),[4] which is completely uncontrived and always has been. This ordinary mind is very close, always present, and empty by nature, but also has luminosity (Tib. *salwa*).[5] So the buddhas, by seeing that natural state of the mind, have realized the true nature. In terms of *gata*, they have "gone" to that true state, and therefore they are called *tathagata*. Primordially, the true nature of mind is empty; it has never arisen and it never ceases, and so it is birthless. But it isn't just a material voidness. It has the quality of luminosity, so the mind is the union of luminosity and emptiness.[6] By hearing and contemplating the teachings and through inference and reasoning, we can understand the presence of this true nature of the mind. Or, through the practice of meditation, we can understand the true nature of the mind.

II. THE HOMAGE

(1) I pay homage to all the buddhas and bodhisattvas.

At the beginning of a text, it is traditional to make a homage. The homage is so that the text will be completed without any obstacles. A homage is made to the Three Jewels so that those who are studying and contemplating the text can understand and realize the importance of the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. This is the homage to the buddhas and bodhisattvas.

In the Buddhist tradition, the buddhas are not considered to be primordial, in the sense that they have not always been buddhas. Instead, a buddha is considered someone who has achieved enlightenment through gradually progressing through successive stages of the path until he or she has achieved the state of Buddhahood. Or, some who have not yet reached the state of Buddhahood have reached the state of a bodhisattva. Therefore, at the beginning of the text, there is a homage to this aspect of the Three Jewels: to the buddhas, who have completed the stages of the path, and to the bodhisattvas who are on the path.

Paying homage to the Buddha makes us aware of the faults of ordinary beings. These two faults are the three main defilements (Skt. *kleshas*), which are very strong, so ordinary beings possess few positive qualities and have a great many negative qualities. By working to remedy the defilements, the negative qualities are gradually diminished and eliminated. When they are cleared away, there is attainment of Buddhahood. The Tibetan word for "buddha" is *sang-gye,* and it illustrates this point. The first syllable, *sang,* means "to diminish" or "to eliminate." The second syllable, *gye,* means "to develop" or "to increase." So when all of these faults have been removed, there is the development of the positive qualities of wisdom, knowledge, and love for all beings. With this love for all beings, there arises a great power, and therefore all of these positive qualities develop and increase. So *sang-gye* means having been cleansed of all the negative qualities and having all the positive qualities developed.

When we pay homage, it is to the Buddha and to those who are on the path that leads from the state of an ordinary being to the state of

Buddhahood. There are three qualities related to the name *bodhisattva,* which is *chang-chup sempa* in Tibetan. The word *bodhi* in Tibetan is *chang-chup.* The first syllable, *chang,* means "to be cleansed or purified" and refers to eliminating negative qualities. A bodhisattva, unlike a buddha, has not eliminated all negative qualities. If the bodhisattva is at the beginning of the path, maybe he or she has purified some of the negative factors; on the highest stages of the path he or she will have eliminated most of these negative qualities. The second syllable, *chup,* means to have obtained the positive qualities. So at the beginning of the path, the bodhisattva has attained some positive qualities, and toward the end of the path, the bodhisattva has obtained a great deal of these positive qualities. In that way, the bodhisattva has the two factors of elimination and realization.

The second part of the word *bodhisattva, sattva,* is *sempa* in Tibetan, which has the meaning of "hero," or someone who is very courageous, because we need to have courage in order to eliminate negative qualities and attain the positive qualities on the path. We need to have courage so that we have confidence and think, "I can do this." A bodhisattva has these three qualities: elimination, realization, and courage.

This is a homage to all the buddhas who have lived in the past, who are alive in the present, and who are yet to come in the future. The homage includes all the realized bodhisattvas on the bodhisattva levels (Skt. *bhumi*). We can also see this as paying homage to the Buddha, which is the nature or essence of the Buddha that is within ourselves. Homage to the bodhisattvas can also be taken to be homage to the eight consciousnesses.[7] Our eight consciousnesses, when transformed, are transformed into the eight principal bodhisattvas. So when one says, "I pay homage to the bodhisattvas," that can also mean the transformation of the eight consciousnesses.

III. THE BRIEF PRESENTATION OF THE TEACHING THROUGH THE SCRIPTURES

It is traditional in treatises to first give a brief outline of the work and then to give a detailed description. For this brief outline

Rangjung Dorje has chosen three brief quotations from the Buddhist scriptures.

We need to have the confidence that we are able to practice the Dharma, follow the path, and attain the result. We can practice and attain the result because we possess buddha nature, or buddha essence. We have this seed or essence, which will manifest with awakening or enlightenment. So first it is taught that this essence exists, and thus we can achieve the result. But who is it who knows that beings have this buddha essence? The Buddha has seen this essence within himself and also in all other sentient beings. Having seen that, he has taught this in the sutras and in the tantras. In the sutras, he taught that within all beings there is this essence of the tathagatas. In the tantras, he taught that there is the essence of the buddhas. Rangjung Dorje begins with a quotation from two different sutras.

A. Quotations from an unidentified sutra

(2) Although beginningless, it has an end.

The brief summary of the text begins with a quotation from a sutra (lines 2–6)[8] stating that samsara doesn't have a beginning. Some people find it strange that samsara should have no beginning, because everything must have a beginning somewhere. But not only beings but all things have no beginning. Take for example a flower: where does a flower come from? It comes from a sprout, which itself came from a seed, and that seed came from last year's flower, and last year's flower came from the previous year's seed, and so on. So the flower has no beginning. Similarly, the succession of lives of an individual in samsara also has no beginning. Although there is no beginning, there is an end, because when one attains the state of Buddhahood there is the end of samsara.

The text says that samsara does have an end, while other texts describe samsara as beginningless and endless, so that could be confusing. For an individual, samsara is beginningless but will have an end. However, since there is an inconceivable number of beings, samsara is endless because there will never be a time when samsara is

completely empty. That is why we may see samsara described as both endless and having an end.

Although samsara is beginningless, the true nature of the mind can be realized and the buddha nature can manifest; therefore samsara does have an end. But buddha nature is obscured by incidental (or adventitious) obscurations, which can be eliminated and removed. In terms of the true nature, the buddha nature is not stained by incidental obscurations. The buddha nature, or buddha essence, remains pure by nature, and it also has the quality of permanence. Therefore, the buddha nature has the qualities of both purity and permanence.

> (3) It is pure by nature and has the quality of permanence.
> (4) It is unseen, because it is obscured by a beginningless covering,

The third line describes the purity of buddha nature from the viewpoint of the true nature of phenomena. We may wonder whether there is any defect in buddha nature, or buddha essence. Buddha nature itself is completely pure and without any fault. It is not sometimes present and sometimes not; it has the quality of permanence. If it is permanent, why can't we see this buddha nature? The reason is that it has been obscured since beginningless time. It has been covered up by something that obscures it so that it cannot be seen. So buddha nature is pure by nature, it is permanent, it has no beginning, and because of this, it has no end.

> (5) Like, for example, a golden statue that has been obscured.
> (6) That was taught by the Buddha.

The five qualities of buddha nature then are: it is beginningless, it has no end, it is pure, it is permanent, and it is obscured. This fifth quality of being obscured and not able to be seen is illustrated by an example found in the *Uttaratantra.* In this example, someone has a large lump of very pure gold and he loses it outside, where it becomes covered by rubbish and dirt. Many years go by, and a poor person comes along and builds a crude shack on this garbage. He lives there with very little food and clothing, yet underneath him is this huge lump of pure gold. But the gold can't say to the man, "I'm a lump of gold and I'm un-

derneath you," and the man can't see into the ground to see that the gold is there. The gold itself hasn't undergone any change in all that time, even though it's obscured by all this garbage; it remains gold and never changes. If a clairvoyant person came along, he would see this poor man in his shack and think, "He's having a very hard time, but he doesn't have to suffer. He's got a huge lump of gold just underneath him, and all he has to do is dig away and reveal it." The clairvoyant feels great compassion for the poor man and says to him, "You don't need to live like this. All you have to do is dig under your floor and you'll find a large nugget of gold." The poor man, of course, has to believe the clairvoyant person in order to get the gold. But if he does believe the clairvoyant and digs under the floor, then the gold will be revealed.

Similarly, we have buddha nature, just like the poor man's hidden gold that was always present and unchanged, but we can't see this buddha nature, and so we experience the suffering that comes from living in samsara. But, because we have buddha nature, or buddha essence, we don't need to continue suffering. The Buddha feels compassion for beings, seeing that they have buddha nature yet experience the suffering of samsara, and he says, "You don't have to undergo all this suffering, because you have within you buddha nature, and through practicing you will be able to manifest it." If we believe in this and practice the Buddhist teachings, we will be able to uncover our buddha nature and gain freedom from samsara.

In terms of the general Sutra teachings, whether we call it the true nature of the mind or buddha nature, it is primordially present and never undergoes any change. It has no solid reality because its nature is emptiness, and, being empty, it does not undergo any change. So we have this unchanging true nature of the mind. We don't perceive this true nature because the mind is directed outward and becomes engaged with the movements and arising of thoughts, and this obscures it.

B. Quotation from the *Mahayana Abhidharma Sutra*

It was taught:

(7) The element of beginningless time
(8) Is the location of all phenomena.

(9) Due to its existence, there are all beings
(10) And also the attainment of nirvana.

There is a quotation from the *Mahayana Abhidharma Sutra* that says that there is the element (Skt. *dhatu*) of beginningless time. The word *dhatu*, or element, means "essence" or "seed." The *Mahayana Abhidharma Sutra* says that this element has been there throughout beginningless time; it is primordial, something we have always had. This element is also said to be the location for all dharmas. The word *dharma* is used in various ways; here it means all that can be known, all knowable phenomena. So this element is the location or the foundation for all phenomena, for all that can be known. Due to having this element, the text says, all beings exist. So all beings who are in samsara are there due to their possession of this element, the buddha nature, or the buddha essence. Because beings do not recognize the buddha nature, they wander in the six realms of samsara. Nirvana is also attained due to this element or seed because it is through realizing the buddha nature that nirvana is attained. Therefore both samsara and nirvana are due to the presence of this element, the buddha nature.

In summary, there is an element that has existed since beginningless time called buddha nature, the essence of the tathagatas. From this element arise all the good qualities that come from practice. It is not the case that some beings who practice will achieve Buddhahood but other beings will not no matter how much they practice. Whoever practices will be able to achieve Buddhahood, because all possess buddha nature, tathagatagarbha, since beginningless time.

C. Quotation from the *Hevajra Tantra*

From a tantra:

(11) All beings are buddhas
(12) But are obscured by incidental stains.
(13) When those have been removed,
(14) There is Buddhahood.

The previous verse was a quotation from the sutras, and this verse is a quotation from the *Hevajra Tantra* saying that all beings are

buddhas. All beings are buddhas because all beings have buddha nature within them. But this buddha nature is obscured by the incidental stains, which are the negative qualities of the mind. By incidental stains we mean stains that are not part of the buddha nature, the buddha essence, much as the dirt and rubbish covering gold are not part of the gold.

Buddha nature is explained in the text through the use of three examples. These examples are given in Maitreya's *Distinguishing the Middle from the Extremes.* The first example is of water, which can be polluted by dirt and made muddy, but the dirt is only incidental because when the water is left to stand it becomes clear again. The second example is of gold, which might develop some tarnish, but this tarnish can be easily removed with a little rubbing without affecting the gold itself. Finally, the sky or empty space is completely pure and unstained, with clouds sometimes appearing to obscure it, but these clouds are not part of the nature of the sky, so they can blow away and leave the sky clear. The purity of the sky is in no way affected by the clouds covering it. These are three examples showing how buddha nature is obscured but can also be purified.

Nagarjuna likewise explains the obscuring of buddha nature, or buddha essence, with an example of the sun and the moon. The sun and moon in themselves are perfectly bright and clear and have no impurities. But the sun and moon can be obscured by various things, such as clouds, dust, smoke, and eclipses. In the same way, buddha nature, which is changeless, can be obscured by the five defilements of desire, aggression, ignorance, pride, and jealousy.

So buddha nature is obscured by stains, but the stains can be eliminated, just as once the clouds are gone from the sun and moon, the sun and moon are perfectly bright and there's no need to create a new moon or sun. In the same way, once what obscures water, gold, and sky is removed, their natural purity appears, and there is no need to create that purity. Buddha nature is not something that we have to develop or create.

There are two principal views of buddha nature: the Rangtong and the Shentong traditions of the Middle Way (Skt. *Madhyamaka*).[9] The Shentong view is taught in Maitreya's *Uttaratantra,* in which the

presence of the buddha nature is explained in different examples. Rangjung Dorje's text follows the presentation taught by Maitreya. Thus, of the two viewpoints, it is the Shentong tradition that is principally explained in this text.

The Rangtong view was taught chiefly by Nagarjuna, who used six different kinds of logical arguments to teach emptiness, and by Chandrakirti, in his text *Entering the Middle Way.* The purpose of the Rangtong view is to counteract any clinging to a belief in the self of an individual or a belief in the solidity of phenomena, by showing that both are empty. Nagarjuna's and Chandrakirti's teachings on emptiness come from the Perfection of Wisdom (Skt. *Prajñaparamita*) sutras. The briefest of the Prajñaparamita sutras is known as the *Heart Sutra,* with its teaching of "no eye, no ear, no nose," and so on. Nagarjuna and Chandrakirti taught emptiness by using reasoning and analysis to show that phenomena really are empty of any nature of their own. In Nagarjuna's and Chandrakirti's texts there is no teaching on the presence of buddha nature because they were concerned only with eliminating a belief in the self and the solidity of phenomena. Therefore, in their teachings on emptiness there is no mention of the presence of buddha nature.

The view of the Shentong school is presented in *The Sutra Requested by Dharani Raj Ishvara,* in which the Buddha teaches not only that all phenomena are empty but also that everyone has buddha nature, or buddha essence, and this buddha nature is free from any defect or change. This teaching presented in this sutra is also taught by the Buddha Maitreya in his great treatise the *Uttaratantra.*

In addition to these differences in view, there is a difference in the practices of the Rangtong and Shentong schools. In the Rangtong tradition one develops a belief in emptiness by using logical deduction and analysis. With this certainty of analysis one gains certainty in the view, and through that one gradually gains the realization of emptiness. Next one begins to practice meditation, but since the foundation of meditation has been formulated by thought, this makes the meditation rather difficult.

The Shentong teachings go back to Asanga in the fourth century, who meditated for twelve years on Maitreya and then was able to

meet Maitreya directly. From this experience he brought back the five works of Maitreya. Three of these works—*The Clear Ornament of Realization, The Adornment of Sutras,* and *Distinguishing the Middle from the Extremes*—were promulgated during his lifetime. The other two—*Distinguishing Dharma and Dharmata* and the *Uttaratantra*—were concealed as Dharma treasures (Tib. *terma*). Later, the master Maitripa, who was a pupil of Naropa, came across a stupa with a crack in it from which a light was shining forth. Maitripa investigated this and saw that inside were the texts *Distinguishing Dharma and Dharmata,* the *Uttaratantra,* and Asanga's commentary to the *Uttaratantra.* He removed these texts, but he couldn't understand them because he didn't have the transmission of the lineage of instructions. So Maitripa supplicated Maitreya, and Maitreya appeared to him in the midst of clouds and gave him the transmission so he could understand these texts. Since Maitripa was a teacher of the Tibetan translator Marpa, these two texts and the transmission of meditation instructions associated with them became part of the Kagyu lineage in Tibet.

In Vikramashila monastic university in India there were nine great masters, including Brahmin Ratnavajra. Ratnavajra had a pupil, the pandita Sajjana, who taught the translators who had come to India from Tibet. The Tibetan translator Loden Sherab received the general teachings and the explanation of the *Uttaratantra* and then went back to Tibet. But two other translators, Tsen Kawo Che and Zu Gaway Dorje, went to India, not wanting just the general explanation or teaching of this text but to receive the *Uttaratantra* tradition as meditation instructions. So they received these instructions creating a meditation lineage. Thus there are two lineages for the *Uttaratantra,* the lineage of explanation and the lineage of meditation. For his two texts, *A Treatise on Buddha Nature* and *Distinguishing Consciousness from Wisdom,* Karmapa Rangjung Dorje followed the transmission of the lineage of meditation instructions. In the sutras and in the tantras, buddha nature is very important. Realizing that, we should work diligently to purify the obscurations covering our buddha nature. Many people tell me that they are practicing but they don't really know what they are doing.

To understand why one is practicing the Dharma and the result that is to be obtained from practice, it's important to realize that there is buddha nature. We live in samsara, experiencing its pain and suffering, but because of buddha nature, because of buddha essence, which is the foundation for the enlightened qualities, practicing the Dharma will definitely result in attaining awakening or enlightenment. If we practice we will attain our goal, and that is why it's important to understand buddha nature.

Question: Some spiritual traditions say that suffering is necessary on the path, but Buddhism says that suffering is the foundation of samsara. Would you comment on that?

Rinpoche: What human beings want is to have peace and happiness. But to actually eliminate suffering, sometimes it's necessary to undergo hardship in the practice of the Dharma. For example, Milarepa underwent hardships and difficulties in his practice. It is not that suffering is necessary. It's that Milarepa thought, "Rather than putting my efforts into obtaining food and wealth or possessions, I should use all my energy to practice the Dharma." As a result of that dedication to Dharma practice, he attained enlightenment.

The suffering itself is not actually necessary for the path. It is as if we are being treated for an illness and the doctor must operate on us and give us some very unpleasant medicine. To gain years of health, we have to undergo some weeks of unpleasantness. Similarly, to eliminate the suffering of samsara, it's necessary sometimes to undergo difficulties and hardships in the practice of the Dharma. But the purpose of that practice is not to be suffering but to be able to gain freedom from suffering.

Q: Some lamas say we can't live like Milarepa, that we have to live in the world.

R: It's very good if we can have the kind of diligence that Milarepa had and be able to practice like him. But it is not wrong to have a lesser degree of diligence in practice. It's perfectly all right to practice just as much Dharma as we are able to. Whatever Dharma practice we do, it will have a positive result and will never be lost.

Q: Is there a special way we can deal with the everyday problems that we have, or do we just go through them? Is there anything we can do to help ourselves?

R: If we are having difficulties, there's actually no method to eliminate them directly. It's just a question of practicing the Dharma, and through that eventually there will be freedom from suffering. Most of these difficulties are experienced because of our mind. So if we examine our mind, we will see that we have very strong hope and great expectations, and as a result of that, we have mental difficulties or suffering. If we lessen that great attachment to how we expect things to be or to turn out, then our mind will become more relaxed. Or we might have great anger or great desire or great attachment and, as a result of that, experience pain and suffering. If we lessen negative emotions, our mind becomes more relaxed. Instead of looking externally for the answer to the problem, we look inward and change the nature of our own mind. Sometimes there may be someone who is harming us, causing us problems, and even if we are good to them or help them, they just cause us harm in return. That can cause us to feel bad and suffer, so we should think, "This is just what people do, because they are ordinary beings. What ordinary beings do is to try to fulfill their own wishes, and to do so they have to harm other people. That's just the nature of ordinary beings, so that is how we would expect people to behave." If we believe this is the nature of people and this is how they're going to behave, then that will make us feel more relaxed since we think that this is just what we should expect. Therefore we don't feel any reason to be angry at them.

Q: I don't understand how samsara is connected to Buddhahood. Coming to an end means that samsara comes to an end. Does that mean Buddhahood also ends in nirvana, or is it permanent?

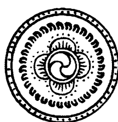
R: When the delusion of samsara is eliminated, we reach Buddhahood. So samsara is beginningless but it comes to an end. Once we reach Buddhahood, there is no return to wandering in samsara. It's as if there is a rope that we mistake for a snake. Seeing the snake is a delusion, and as a result of that, we feel fear. Buddhahood

is like the rope, and the delusion is like the snake, or samsara. Once we see that there's no snake, then the delusion of the snake disappears and the suffering of the fear of the snake is gone. In the same way, once there is Buddhahood, there is no return to wandering in samsara.

The word *nirvana* is a Sanskrit term. The Tibetan equivalent is *nyangen ledepa*, with *nyangen* meaning "misery, pain, and suffering," and *ledepa* meaning "to transcend." So the full meaning is "the transcendence of pain and suffering." Once the nature of the mind is realized, there is the transcendence of pain and suffering. We leave pain and suffering behind and enter into a state of peace and bliss.

2

AN EXPLANATION OF THE MAHAYANA ABHIDHARMA SUTRA



We have now come to the fourth major section of the text, which is a detailed description that takes up most of the treatise. This detailed explanation has five parts: (1) an explanation of the *Mahayana Abhidharma Sutra* quotation, (2) a discussion of correct and incorrect concepts, (3) an explanation of buddha nature, (4) a refutation of the objections of others, and (5) a description of buddha nature, or buddha essence, through its qualities. In this chapter we will discuss the first point, which is a detailed explanation of the quotation from the *Mahayana Abhidharma Sutra* given in lines 7 though 10. This detailed explanation deals with six terms used in the quotation. First the term "beginningless" is explained.

IV. THE DETAILED EXPLANATION OF THE TEACHING

A. The explanation of the *Mahayana Abhidharma Sutra*

1. *Beginningless*

(15) "Beginningless" means that
(16) There is nothing previous to it.

(17) The "time" is that very instant;
(18) It hasn't come from somewhere else.

There are two aspects to the concept of beginninglessness: relative beginninglessness and ultimate beginninglessness. Relative beginninglessness is the teaching that beings have always wandered in samsara without realizing their true nature and therefore they remain in a state of delusion.

There are the teachings on ultimate beginninglessness in the Sutra tradition, from the Middle Way school, and also in the Vajrayana. The meaning in these traditions is the same, but the method of explanation is different. In the Middle Way tradition one consciously thinks using analytical meditation, "This is what the relative is like; this is what the ultimate is like." In this way, one gains understanding through a process of analysis. In the Mahamudra tradition of the Vajrayana, in contrast, one follows what is called placement meditation, relying on direct insight into the actual nature of the mind until this nature is directly understood. The meaning is the same, but the approach is different.

The Middle Way can be divided into two views or schools: the Rangtong view and the Shentong view. The Rangtong view makes a clear distinction between the Sutra and Tantra traditions. In the Rangtong tradition one develops an understanding of emptiness by a careful analysis of phenomena. This school practices the tantric path by visualizing the yidam deity, the deity's ornaments, palace, and pure realm. One might then ask, "If the nature of phenomena is emptiness, why does one have to meditate on all these details of the deity?" This seems to be a problem in the Rangtong separation of the sutras and the tantras. In terms of meditating on the pure nature of the mind, there is the analysis that establishes emptiness. But this analysis of emptiness does not seem to be related to the appearance of deities and their palaces as expressions of wisdom.

How can we join the Sutra and Tantra views? This is done by the Shentong tradition, in which the yidam deity becomes the natural embodiment of the pure nature, buddha nature. In yidam

practice, all the wisdom qualities are manifested as the body, the palace, and the consorts of the deity. Thus in the creation stage, and also in the completion stage, we rest in the true nature of the mind. In the Shentong view this resting in the true nature of the mind while visualizing the deity is the joining of the Sutra and Tantra traditions.

So buddha nature is the foundation for the appearance of the yidam deity, the deity's palace, and so on in meditation. Although the essence of the true nature of the mind is emptiness, there is also luminosity, and through this luminosity there is the appearance of the yidam deity. We can therefore transform impure appearances into pure appearances through meditation on the manifestation of the deity in the creation stage. With the instructions of one's teacher, one gains the direct recognition or introduction to the true nature in the completion stage, which is the basis for the manifestations of the yidam deity.

In the Shentong tradition a definite understanding of the nature of the mind is gained through understanding buddha nature. In the Mahamudra tradition, there is also an understanding of the true nature of the mind brought about through the instructions on how to look directly at the nature of the mind. So what difference is there between the Shentong and the Mahamudra? There is a difference in terms of the instructions. In the Shentong tradition, one uses reasoning to deduce that there is buddha nature and that this buddha nature, though empty, has its own natural quality of luminosity. In the Mahamudra tradition, one receives meditation instructions from one's guru, and through these instructions, one directly sees the nature of the mind and realizes that the mind has no reality of its own. One sees that this emptiness of mind is not just a voidness but also has the qualities of luminosity. In short, in the Shentong view, one gains this view of buddha nature, or buddha essence, through reasoning; whereas in the Mahamudra tradition, one gains this understanding of the true nature of the mind through direct perception. Basically these two traditions are the same, whether they talk of the buddha nature or the true nature of the mind. In Mahamudra, this direct insight is due to

the meditation instructions of one's teacher. In the Shentong tradition, it is realized through a process of reasoning.

Rangjung Dorje's text explains things in terms of the Mahamudra of the Vajrayana. The Second Shamarpa Kachö Wangpo taught that we have a present mind, which is a clear state in which thoughts arise. The present mind with its luminosity, therefore, is on the conventional level.[10] So that aspect or appearance, which is relative or deluded, is just seen, without any attempt to change it in any way but simply leaving it as it is, and that itself is the ultimate. Thus when the ultimate aspect and the relative aspect are not recognized, they seem to be different; but when they are recognized, there is no real difference between the two.

Line 17 says, "The 'time' is that very instant," meaning that, in that very instant, there is the present mind whose essence is emptiness and whose nature is luminosity. When we recognize this nature, that is the realization of ultimate beginninglessness. And from the ultimate nature of the mind, there arises the relative. So appearances are not a deluded state that is different from the ultimate. This very instant of the mind itself has no beginning; it has not come from far away or from somewhere else—it is beginningless. That is the ultimate explanation of what is meant by beginningless.

What is meant by "time"? Time is just that very instant of arising. There is just that instant, because time itself has no reality. The past is merely a mental creation, a mental fabrication. The future is also merely a mental fabrication. There is just this very short, subtle instant, the instant of the arising of appearances. The arising of relative appearances has no real basis in terms of a perceiver and a perception because that instant of the arising of relative appearances is due simply to not having realized the true nature. Because it is an arising of appearances due to not realizing the true nature, there is nowhere for those appearances to go; they just vanish. Therefore, in terms of time, there is just that single instant of the arising of the relative appearances. There isn't really a yesterday or a tomorrow or a today; they are just mental fabrications. There is only this state of beginninglessness alluded to in line 17.

The last line of the section says, "It hasn't come from somewhere

else." There is just that instant of the relative appearances of these incidental obscurations that arise due to our not having understood the true nature, and that is all. It is not that that instant of the relative appearance of the incidental obscurations is there due to some previous cause and then due to that previous cause something else happens, and then due to that something else happens, and so on. These incidental obscurations and so on just arise in that instant due to our not having understood the true nature. But in terms of the twelve phases of interdependent origination, ignorance gives rise to activity, which gives rise to consciousness, which gives rise to name and form, and so on; that is a description of the process that occurs on a relative level. Also, one has had previous lives, so one life leads to another life, which leads to another life, and so on, and in that sense there is a sequence of events. But this sequence is also just on the level of relative appearances. On the ultimate level, these appearances arise only because of our not having understood or recognized the radiance or clarity of the true nature of reality, and in not recognizing it, there is the perception of relative appearances. Other than that, there is no cause. In terms of ultimate truth, there are just the one or two instants of the arising of relative appearances from the clarity of the dharmata, of the true nature.

If we search for the source of these appearances, we cannot find them; they just arise because we have not recognized the true nature. We can examine or analyze these appearances in terms of their arising, their abiding, and where they go. If we examine these appearances to find out from where they arise, we cannot find any place whence they arise; if we look for the nature of this arising, nothing can be found. Then if we examine them to try to see where they go, there is nowhere that they go; they simply disappear. So as we examine these appearances, they are discovered not to have any source, nor any location, nor anywhere they go. There is only this single arising in that instant of the relative appearances, so that they do not come from somewhere else, and for that reason, they are said to be beginningless. Although they are beginningless, they do have an end, because these delusory appearances and obscurations cease when the true nature has been realized. So although they are beginningless, they have an end.

2. *The element*

(19) The element has no creator,
(20) But it is given this name, because it retains its own characteristics.

"The element has no creator" refers to a beginningless element that is always present. The first point was an explanation of beginningless, and the second point is an explanation of what is meant by "element," which here means buddha nature, buddha essence. We might ask, "Who created this element?" No one created it; it has no creator, but it does possess its own qualities and characteristics. The Buddha's knowledge, the Buddha's love, the qualities of the Buddha's speech and mind are all present in this element; they are all ready to manifest. The text condenses this thought into "element," but it means "the essence of the tathagatas" or "the essence of the sugatas" or the "essence of the buddhas." So the essence of the buddhas is this element that has within it all the qualities or characteristics of a buddha ready to manifest.

Following this is a description of the word *element. Element* means the true nature, the buddha nature. Earlier it was said that Nagarjuna and Chandrakirti taught on emptiness only. However, Nagarjuna wrote many different texts and treatises in relation to the three turnings of the wheel of Dharma. For the first turning of the Dharma wheel he wrote on the nature of samsara—how samsara is without any essence, on the law of karma, and so on. These teachings were in the form of letters or advice to a friend. For the second turning he wrote a collection of works on the methods of logical reasoning that established the Middle Way. The main text of this collection is *The Root Wisdom of the Middle Way.* For the third turning he wrote a collection of praises, which includes *Praise to the Dharmadhatu* and *Praise to the True Nature.* In these he says that all beings have this element and it is due to this element that beings can achieve the goal of enlightenment. He gives the analogy that if gold exists, then we can search for gold and eventually find it; but if gold does not exist, then no matter how much we search, we will not find any. Because this bud-

dha nature exists, beings can practice and attain the goal. They can reach enlightenment because all beings have the buddha nature.

This element has no creator; it is beginningless. It also is not part of the appearances that arise from oneself. Being not a thing or a substance, it is not a part of worldly appearances, so its essence or nature is emptiness. However, it is not just a voidness, because it is an emptiness that is inseparable from the dharmadhatu, so it has the nature of clarity. This element is called a dhatu because it possesses its own characteristics. It is different from all other things in that it possesses its own characteristics, and while being empty and not having any true reality, it also has the nature of luminosity. So buddha nature has the characteristics of both emptiness and clarity and also being inseparable from the dharmadhatu, and for this reason it is called the element.

3. *Phenomena: samsara and nirvana*

(21) Phenomena are explained to be
(22) Samsara and nirvana appearing as a duality.
(23) This is named "the ground of the latencies of
ignorance."
(24) The movements of mental events—correct and
incorrect thoughts—
(25) Are the cause of generation;
(26) The causal condition is taught to be the alaya.

There are two kinds of phenomena: samsara and nirvana. The phenomenon of samsara is a state of delusion in which the beings of samsara don't recognize their own mind. The Tibetan word for samsara is *khorwa* (*'khor-ba*), which literally means "to go around and around." Beings in samsara sometimes experience happiness and sometimes suffering and are continually involved in birth, illness, aging, and death in an endless cycle. Samsara is the result of being in a state of the delusion of not recognizing one's own nature. When there is freedom from that delusion, the result is freedom from suffering and pain, and one reaches a state of nirvana where there is peace and bliss. But in actual fact these two aspects of samsara and

nirvana have no true reality; where there is a state of delusion, samsara and nirvana appear to be two separate things.

Although samsara and nirvana appear to be two separate states, in actual fact they are not separate. The basis for this dualistic appearance is called the "ground," from which arise the latencies of ignorance.[11] In the Sutra tradition, particularly in the Prajñaparamita sutras, it is taught that all phenomena are empty. The *Heart Sutra* says, "There are no eyes, no ears, no nose, no tongue, no body, no mind." In this way it is taught that everything is empty. In this tradition emptiness is explained through reasoning. By using three main logical arguments, it is explained why there is no true nature to the eyes and why the eyes are by nature empty and why all phenomena, being empty, have no true nature.

The great master Chandrakirti, the master Nagarjuna, and the master Shantarakshita explained through logical reasoning why all phenomena are empty by nature. By studying these arguments we gain a conviction that phenomena are empty. We learn that although conventional appearances clearly exist—we do see trees and rocks and so on—on the ultimate level they are empty. It is taught that this emptiness of phenomena is not a voidness like a vacuum. Emptiness has a pure and an impure aspect, with the pure aspect being buddha nature, or buddha essence, which has the power of luminosity and awareness. So buddha nature is present in emptiness; emptiness is not just a void. This was extensively taught by Maitreya in the *Uttaratantra,* in which he demonstrated how the luminosity or clarity of buddha nature is present everywhere.

In the Mahamudra, buddha nature is said not to be concealed or distant. When we just look at our mind, we see various thoughts arise, but instead of following after these thoughts, we look directly at the mind to see from where these thoughts have arisen, what the source of these thoughts is. In Mahamudra meditation we discover that the source of mind and thoughts cannot be found.

Then we look through our body from head to foot for the location of the mind, and we cannot find it within the body, outside the body, or in between. That is because the mind and thoughts do not have any reality. There is no reality to dualistic appearances. Then, we

might think, "Well, if that is so, does that mean that there's just nothing at all?" No, there isn't just voidness, because the mind has luminosity and the ability to understand and know; clearly the mind is not just nothing.

The mind has this empty nature, but it also has the aspect of luminosity and an unceasing nature. Due to the power of this luminosity, there are all the various appearances and things that can arise. Because the mind is directed outward, through the power of luminosity and unceasing appearances, the empty nature of the mind is not recognized. Since the empty essence of the mind is unceasing and is luminosity, the empty nature of the mind is forgotten. When this empty nature of the mind is forgotten, this is called the ground of the latencies of ignorance because it is this ground from which all delusions and delusory appearances arise.

In the Kagyu tradition, realizing or "seeing" the true nature of the mind is described in terms of seeing ordinary mind. "Ordinary" in this case doesn't mean "usual"; it means mind without any contrivance, mind as it always was. It means just looking at the nature of the mind without any thought of "I have realized something."

Through Mahamudra meditation there is direct recognition of ordinary mind. Without that direct recognition, there is the ground with all the latencies of ignorance. This means that, due to the presence of ignorance, all the delusory appearances gradually arise, with correct and incorrect thoughts of conceptualization also arising. These arise like air from this ground. So there is this very subtle movement of the wind of conceptualization.[12] It is not an obvious movement of energy but a very subtle movement in this ground of ignorance. First there is this ground of ignorance, then within that there is the subtle movement of conceptualization which then creates the movement and instability of the mind.

With the recognition of this ground, all the wisdom, compassion, and power of Buddhahood arises. When we do not recognize this ground, delusion arises. Thus, the ground of ignorance is like the root for both delusion and liberation and is therefore called the universal ground (Skt. *alaya*), since it is the condition through which samsara arises.

Rangjung Dorje explains that by our not realizing the element, the buddha nature, there is samsara, and by our realizing the element, there is nirvana. So by either realizing or not realizing, there arises nirvana or samsara respectively, and this is what is meant by phenomena. So whether samsara or nirvana arises depends upon whether the element is realized or not. "Ignorance" in the phrase "the ground of the latencies of ignorance" means not understanding buddha nature, or buddha essence. The latencies of ignorance are the tendency of the subtle ignorance of not understanding the true nature. The ground of the latencies of ignorance creates both correct and incorrect thoughts. Correct thoughts are those that do understand the true nature, and incorrect thoughts are those that do not understand the true nature. Both of these kinds of thoughts arise from the ground of latencies.

On the basis of the ground of the latencies of ignorance, there is the movement of mental events—these correct or incorrect thoughts. The mind is itself in a state of peace or stillness, and then this movement occurs because of the arising of thoughts or mental events, like waves on water that is agitated by the wind. So there is this movement, the causal condition of which is the universal ground, the alaya.

This is described by Milarepa in his song to the girl Paldarbum in the collection of Kagyu songs, *The Rain of Wisdom.* Paldarbum asks how she should meditate on the nature of the mind when thoughts arise, and Milarepa says, "When you are able to meditate on the nature of the mind when thoughts are arising, these thoughts should be seen as being a manifestation of the mind." So once she has gained a definite understanding of the nature of the mind and a definite understanding of the arising of thoughts—once she has understood them to be just manifestations of the mind—these thoughts themselves can become pacified so that the nature of the mind can be seen clearly and clarity is established. In lines 24 and 25 the text says, "The movements of mental events—correct and incorrect thoughts— / Are the cause of generation"—the arising of samsara and nirvana. It's the same thing that Milarepa is saying when he says that thoughts are manifestations arising from the mind.

4. *The location of buddha nature*

(27) The location is the "essence of the jinas."
(28) Incorrect conceptualization
(29) Is completely located within the mind's purity.

The alaya consciousness is the location or the foundation for all of samsara and nirvana. The foundation or location for all of this is called "the essence of the jinas," which is another term for "the essence of the sugatas" or "the essence of the tathagatas." That is, everything is located within buddha nature. So there is buddha nature, or buddha essence, and there is this incorrect conceptualization. Where does this incorrect conceptualization have its basis? It too is based upon buddha nature; there is nowhere else that it can be based.

There was a great Gelugpa scholar, Changcha Rolpe Dorje, who taught meditation in terms of finding his mother. He described how, as a small child, he was sitting in his mother's lap and was looking for his mother. He looked in all directions but couldn't see his mother anywhere. Eventually his elder brother said, "Your mother's right there." He looked up behind him and there was his mother—he had been sitting in her lap all along. In the same way, we are in this expanse of the dharmata, the true nature of phenomena, and we are looking at all of these delusions; we're looking everywhere for this true nature of reality. But if we just look inward, even with all of our deluded thoughts, the true nature is there because we are present within that true nature. There's nowhere else that we can be.

5. *The nature of samsara*

(30) That very purity exists now.
(31) It exists but, due to ignorant conceptualization,
(32) Is not seen; therefore there is samsara.

We might ask, "Does this buddha nature undergo any change or transformation?" It does not undergo any change; it is pure and it has always remained in that state of purity. But, due to all the delusions arising from our ignorance, we are not able to see that pure nature. It is present, but we are unable to see it.

As we saw in the earlier example, even though gold lies beneath the ground for thousands of years, it undergoes no change. It always remains gold. But this gold can't be seen because it's obscured by the ground. In the same way, buddha nature undergoes no change and always remains pure, but, due to the conceptualization arising from ignorance, it is obscured and we are unable to see it. That is the nature of samsara.

6. The end of samsara

(33) If they are dispelled, there is nirvana,
(34) And this is termed "the end."

When ignorance is dispelled, samsara comes to an end. It is said in Gampopa's *Jewel Ornament of Liberation* that buddha nature is all-pervasive, like the sesame oil within sesame seeds or like butter in milk or like silver in silver ore. Buddha nature, or buddha essence, is present, but unless one pounds the sesame seeds, one won't get any oil; without churning the milk, one won't get any butter; without melting the ore, one won't get any silver. So one has to pound, churn, or melt to get to the useful substance of sesame oil, butter, or silver respectively. In the same way, one must act on samsara to bring it to an end.

While in the state of ignorance, we have a limited degree of understanding and wisdom. When ignorance is dispelled, we develop wisdom, compassion, and other enlightened qualities. With this wisdom we are able to encounter buddha nature directly, causing ignorance to be dispelled, and we are able to let limitless wisdom, love, compassion, and understanding shine through. This wisdom is not mixed with pride and anger but with a supreme love and compassion for beings. Ordinary love and compassion are compared to a mother with no arms who sees her only child being carried away by a river and cannot do anything to save her child. But the compassion developed from directly seeing buddha nature is not this helpless kind of compassion; it is a compassion that has power. Therefore when there is direct realization of buddha nature, there arise wisdom, compassion, and power to end samsara.

So when ignorance is dispelled, there is the end, the state of nirvana. Ignorance is said to be beginningless, but, with the realization of the true nature, it does come to an end. However, ignorance isn't something that really does have an end because the delusory appearances, the incidental obscurations, never had any real existence. Not having any reality, it can't really end. And as for the wisdom that is one's nature, the primordial nature, that also never ends. So ultimately there isn't an end, but in terms of relative appearances there is an end. There is a beginningless state that ends, and for that reason the term "end" is used.

These were the six points making up the detailed explanation of the quotation from the *Mahayana Abhidharma Sutra.*

Question: You said that buddha nature is empty, that it has luminosity and awareness, and that when emptiness is somehow forgotten, that is what causes the universal ground to come into existence. Can you say more about it?

Rinpoche: If one looks at the mind, there is luminosity and one cannot find the mind. But normally, one does not recognize that, because one is looking outward toward all the different appearances. When the mind is directed to all these appearances, these become clearer and more vivid, so that there are more and more thoughts. It's like when we're dreaming. A dream begins with some thoughts arising, and then we see all sorts of appearances. Things in the dream become stronger, so we see horses and elephants. These strong experiences come from thoughts arising in the mind, and then these thoughts manifest so they appear as concrete images outside us. When buddha nature or the true nature of the mind is not cultivated, these appearances become stronger and coarser, causing more delusions and conceptualizations.

Q: So should we direct our mind to that very moment and does that very moment contain buddha nature? If we are able to rest upon that very moment, can we unfold our buddha nature?

R: In the Sutra tradition one uses the process of deduction and analysis to arrive at the understanding of emptiness. It is said that

buddha nature by nature is empty, that it is the inseparability of space and wisdom. This means buddha nature is empty by nature and doesn't exist as anything material. Even so, there is still the ultimate wisdom and compassion for beings. Even though buddha nature, or buddha essence, has no solid reality, still there is this wisdom and compassion. In the Sutra teachings this is proved through deduction and analysis. In the Vajrayana tradition we do not use analysis but rather we look directly at buddha nature to gain an understanding of it.

Q: If we are able to rest our mind without movement in meditation, how does that unfold our buddha nature?

R: It's not just resting the mind without movement; we also need to look at the nature of the mind. We need to see the empty nature of the mind and its characteristic of luminosity. This is inexpressible in words, so we look directly at it. Many of the sutras of the Prajñaparamita literature and also many of the spiritual songs of the great mahasiddhas such as Saraha state that this cannot be expressed in words or thoughts. It is like a mute person who tastes molasses; he experiences the sweet taste, but if someone asks him what it is like, he can't say anything because he can't speak. We look at the nature of mind and see it as being beyond expression in words.

Q: Could you say more about the expression "samsara and nirvana are not far away"?

R: Generally, it seems that samsara and nirvana are very separate from each other, in that to reach nirvana we have to accumulate a great deal of merit and apply ourselves to the path. In the Sutra tradition, it is said that before we can reach liberation we have to gather merit for three aeons lasting millions of years. So it sounds as if nirvana is very far away. But in the Vajrayana, we work with directly looking at the nature of the mind. If there is the recognition of the true nature of the mind, then there is no ignorance and we achieve liberation. So in the Vajrayana, samsara and nirvana are not far from each other.

From the beginning, we have been in a state of delusion and ig-

norance. But the nature of the mind is emptiness, and the mind has the characteristic of luminosity. If we look at the nature of the mind, we will see its emptiness and its luminosity. This has not been newly created; it is always there, but we need to have the direct recognition of it. It's not that we have to meditate on something that is not empty in order to make it empty, or meditate on something that has no luminosity in order to make it have luminosity. Since the nature of the mind is emptiness and luminosity, what we have to do is directly see the nature of the mind. This is the special method used in the Vajrayana.

In the Sutra tradition there is the analysis of external phenomena using logic to prove that the mind is empty so that we then have the conceptual belief of the emptiness of phenomena. But when we look directly into the mind, we see the emptiness of the mind. One sees that there is no shape, no color, no form to the mind and that there is no mind to be found. So when thoughts or feelings such as anger arise, we normally do not examine them and they are not recognized. If anger arises and is unexamined, it feels very sharp, strong, and powerful. But if we examine it and think, "Where is this anger? What is this anger? Where has it come from?" we do not end up saying, "Ah, here it is—this is the anger," or "I found the anger in my head." We will not find the anger anywhere, because the nature of the anger is emptiness. We have to look at anger directly in order to have the recognition of the very nature of this anger. This is called the direct path because something is directly known, not worked out through deduction.

Q: Rinpoche, you said that the mind is not seen, that the mind cannot see the mind. But you also said that the mind arises. Can you explain?

R: We must look at the relative level and the ultimate level of reality. When we speak of the mind not being able to see the mind or say that the nature of the mind is emptiness, we are talking about a teaching on buddha nature, which is an ultimate teaching. Then when our attention is directed externally, there is the mind there. Thoughts arise in the mind; sometimes there is desire, sometimes

there is anger, so at those times, there is the mind. So, on a relative level, there is the mind, but on the ultimate level, its nature is emptiness. We could say "mind as it appears" (the relative level) and "mind as it really is" (the ultimate level).

Q: Rinpoche, you said that the mind is directed outward and this is why mind does not perceive the true nature of mind. Could you clarify this?

R: That explanation is based on one's experience. In one's experience of samsara, the mind is focused outward on the perceptions of form, taste, sound, smell, and touch, so one becomes involved with thoughts without turning inward and looking to see who is experiencing these appearances, who is thinking. Instead of the mind being focused inward on who is experiencing or thinking, the mind is focused outward and becomes engaged with those thoughts.

Q: When you say that the mind should focus inward, that sounds dualistic. Does "focusing inward" mean self-awareness?

R: There is what is called self-knowing wisdom, in which the mind sees itself in meditation. But Chandrakirti, in *Entering the Middle Way,* and Shantideva, in the wisdom chapter of *Entering the Bodhisattva's Way of Life,* say that the mind cannot see itself. Basically they refute the Chittamatra view; they say that the mind is unable to see itself. Some people then have a doubt about that in meditation, saying, "One can't do a meditation in which the mind is supposed to see itself because it is not possible for the mind to see its own nature." If the mind were a thing, it would not be able to see itself. But because the mind has no reality, then that can be known, and when that is known then the mind is seeing its own true nature; it is self-knowing. This term *self-knowing* (Tib. *rang rig*) can be used in different ways. In the Pramana, the teachings of epistemology and logic, this term is used in a specific way in the context of direct perception; when there is direct knowledge through the perception of the senses, there is also this direct knowledge of self-knowing, which is purely a description of the fact that we know what we see or what we think. That is what is referred to in the Pramana teachings as self-knowing.

But that is not the same thing that is being denied by *Entering the Middle Way* or the wisdom chapter of *Entering the Bodhisattva's Way of Life.* In these two works what is being denied is the mind being a real entity, some kind of thing that is yet able to see itself and know itself. When they say that the mind is not able to know its unreal nature, is not able to see its empty nature and its clarity, that is something else again. That is what is meant by "turning inward."

In the sutras the nature of the mind is described as being something beyond words and thought. We can just describe the true nature of the mind by saying, "It has no true reality, but it has clarity," and so on. But it cannot be fully described in words, and it can't be fully understood through analysis or reasoning. We can analyze it, thinking, "There's no place from which it came, there's no cessation, and it has no real nature; it's empty," and so on. We can understand it through reasoning, but still its true nature is beyond that. It is like the field of perception of the individual self-knowing wisdom which one gains through a direct experience in meditation, and that is why it is just the field of perception for that and not for ordinary words or thought.

Q: Rinpoche, you said that at the ultimate level, things arise because we do not recognize the true nature. Does that mean that if we did recognize the true nature, nothing would arise?

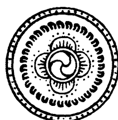
R: There are five paths. First there is the path of accumulation, where one is accumulating merit and wisdom. Second there is the path of application, where one is practicing meditation. Third there is the path of vision, the first level of the bodhisattvas, where, due to the previous two paths, one sees the true nature of phenomena but, due to latent tendencies, the relative appearances still arise. This means that sometimes in meditation these appearances do not arise, but afterwards, in the post-meditation stage, one does experience these relative appearances. Because of this, one must then follow the fourth path, the path of meditation, in which one gradually habituates oneself to the vision of the true nature of phenomena. Finally, having done that, one reaches the fifth path, where there are no longer any latencies and these relative delusory appearances no

longer arise. Nevertheless one has the wisdom of being able to see all of the impure appearances that are arising to other beings. So one can perceive the appearances that other beings experience, and therefore one has compassion without an object. Along with this enlightened nondualistic compassion for beings, one also develops activity to benefit beings for as long as there is samsara.

In the *Uttaratantra* there is the description first of Buddhahood, then of the qualities of Buddhahood, and then of buddha-activity, which is permanent and continuous and spontaneous. Because of having wisdom and compassion without reference point, there is the continuous, unceasing activity of a buddha.

3

CORRECT AND INCORRECT CONCEPTS



THIS CHAPTER on correct and incorrect concepts has three parts: (1) the explanation of how samsara arises through incorrect conceptualization, (2) the explanation of the root of delusion and how this arises through acquisition and rejection, and (3) the explanation of how this is remedied.

B. Correct and incorrect concepts

1. How samsara arises through incorrect concepts

(35) "Beginning" and "end" are dependent upon conceptualization,
(36) Mental events that are like winds,
(37) That cause karma and kleshas to arise.
(38) They manifest the skandhas, dhatus, ayatanas,
(39) And all the phenomena of dualistic appearances.

Samsara is beginningless, and therefore the incidental obscurations of samsara are also beginningless. We can also say that these obscurations belong to this very instant. In either case, they are removed when we are able to see the nature of emptiness, the true nature. At that point there is the attainment of nirvana.

Both the beginning and end of the path are dependent upon conceptualization, which appears as the duality of samsara and nirvana. But the nature of thoughts is contrary to the true nature, and therefore we cannot directly realize dharmata. So the subtle aspect of thoughts is the appearance of dualism, which develops and becomes more obvious and stronger. First there is the mere dualistic appearance; when this becomes stronger, the sensory consciousnesses of form, sound, taste, and so on appear. From these develop the skandhas, the dhatus, and the ayatanas.

This development of mental activity is compared to the movement of wind. With the movement of mental events, there are good and bad thoughts, and from these result the activities of the body and speech. So from good mental activity there arise good actions or karmas of body and speech; with the arising of negative thoughts arise bad actions or karmas of the body and speech. When these mental activities become coarser, the false belief of a permanent self and the false belief of the solidity of others develop into the defilements of desire, aggression, pride, envy, and so on. This is how karma and defilements arise due to the coarsening and increasing development of the mental events, which then create samsara.

These mental events give rise to the defilements, skandhas, dhatus, and ayatanas, which produce our worldly appearances. The skandhas describe the present nature of these appearances; the dhatus describe how they are a cause for future appearances; and the ayatanas describe past appearances that have arisen. So the skandhas, dhatus, and ayatanas comprise these dualistic appearances.

How do phenomena of dualistic appearances arise? They arise because of the buddha nature. But buddha nature, or buddha essence, and dualistic appearances are very different. Dualistic appearances are perceptions of mountains and rocks, of self and others, and so on, whereas buddha nature is just the essence of emptiness and the nature of luminosity. Therefore we might ask, "How can the one arise from the other?" The answer is that mental events give rise to karma and kleshas and the skandhas, dhatus, and ayatanas.

The Sanskrit word *skandha* means "aggregates." The Buddha taught that everything that appears has no real existence; all appear-

ances are skandhas, or accumulations of different things. He taught that they are not single or solid, but only an aggregation of many factors. There are five skandhas. All things that we see as external objects do not have real existence; they are just a collection of many factors gathered together, which is the first skandha of form. The second skandha of sensation is the physical and mental sensations of liking, not liking, or feeling neutral toward something. The third skandha of identification distinguishes between different things, so one knows what is being perceived. The fourth skandha of mental activity is all of the various things that arise in the mind. And finally, the fifth skandha of consciousnesses gathers all of these various factors together.

The eighteen elements (Skt. *dhatu*) give rise to the skandhas in the future. Because they are causal conditions of the skandhas, they are given the name "element." The first six elements are the six consciousnesses: the visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, kinesthetic, and mental consciousnesses. These six consciousnesses arise due to the six sensory organs of the eyes, the ears, the nose, the tongue, the body, and the mind, making the next six elements. Finally, the six sensory objects—visual images, sounds, smells, tastes, physical sensations, and mental thoughts—that give rise to the sensory consciousnesses make up the last six elements. These eighteen dhatus are the six consciousnesses, the six sensory organs, and the six sensory objects.

Next there are the twelve bases (Skt. *ayatana*), or *kye-che* in Tibetan, which means "to arise and develop." This refers to the way in which the inner sensory consciousnesses arise and develop. So, relatively speaking, there are external objects and inner consciousnesses. The external objects are the six sensory objects of visual forms, sounds, smells, tastes, physical sensations, and mental phenomena. Due to these, the sensory consciousnesses of the eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body and the mental consciousness arise. So these are the six external objects and six consciousnesses, making up the twelve ayatanas.

In this process the skandhas, dhatus, and ayatanas create the dualistic appearance of external objects and inner consciousnesses. This is just like a dream. In a dream we may see a place, people, and houses, but in actual fact, there are no people or houses there. However, the mind believes the houses and the people to be present,

because of our experiences during the daytime. Then when we're asleep, we can dream about a pleasant place where we can enjoy ourselves or we can dream of unpleasant places and things that are very frightening and dangerous, which creates great fear. These appearances in dreams appear vividly; the ground that we walk on in our dream is solid, the houses are just like real houses, and the mountains just like real mountains. All of these appear, but there isn't really anything there. In the same way, there is buddha nature, the nature of which is empty, and from it arise all of these dualistic appearances.

Therefore all appearances arise from the mind, and this can be proved through reasoning. When we see appearances, they look as if they are real; they don't appear to us as creations from our own mind. We see the mind as being inside and all these appearances as being outside. But in fact, the things that we see outside do not have any real existence. Take, for example, the hand. We think there is a hand—we see a hand—but there is no real reality to that hand. There's a thumb, a first finger, second finger, third finger, and little finger. None of these is a hand—they are the thumb and fingers. Then there are the flesh and the bones and so on, and none of these is the hand; each one has its own different name. Is there any hand that can exist separately from all these parts? No, there cannot be a hand apart from all these things, but none of those things is itself a hand.

So there isn't really a hand because it is a collection of parts made in our mind. But then we might think that perhaps the parts of the hand really exist as distinct objects, such as the fingers. But if we look at a finger, it's just made of different parts: a nail, a first joint, and so on, none of which is a finger. So there really isn't an independently existing finger either.

It is not just the hand that has no real existence. All external things, in that same way, have no real existence; they are all just appearances of the mind.

In the quintessential meditation instructions, we are first told to realize how all external appearances are the mind. Having meditated that all external appearances are the mind, we are then told to meditate on the emptiness of the mind. We look into the nature of the mind to see that the mind itself lacks any true reality. Then there is the teach-

ing on the naturally present emptiness, which means that this emptiness of the mind is not just a void, but that everything is able to appear from it. This is called the supreme emptiness, the emptiness that is supreme, the naturally present, self-liberating emptiness. Just by its presence it is spontaneously liberated.

2. How accepting and rejecting is the root of delusion

(40) Someone who strives for and discards them is deluded.
(41) What can be negated through rejecting your own projections?
(42) What can be gained by acquiring your own projections?
(43) Isn't this belief in duality a fraud?

The second point of correct and incorrect concepts is how acquisition and rejection is the root of delusion. It has already been shown that all appearances arise from the mind. If all appearances arise from the mind, then the actions of acquisition and rejection must be deluded. Because we are in a state of delusion, these appearances seem to be external to us, and we then treat some of these appearances as good and others as bad. With the distinction of good and bad, we engage in actions of accepting and rejecting. But these actions of accepting and rejecting are deluded, incorrect, because everything is an appearance of the mind, and so there is nothing to get rid of and nothing to be gained.

The arising of samsaric appearances is not in itself particularly harmful, but when we accept or reject these appearances, we develop an incorrect way of thinking, a state of delusion. When samsaric appearances have arisen, we may feel that something is "good," and therefore we feel attachment and wish to acquire it. On the other hand, if something is perceived as "bad," we feel revulsion toward it and wish to get rid of it. In this way, the activity of acquisition and rejection of samsaric appearances gives rise to thoughts, which then give rise to the kleshas, karma, skandhas, dhatus, and ayatanas. What is wrong with liking and disliking things is that all the samsaric appearances have arisen from our own mind, and what benefit can be had from trying to get rid of the appearance of our own mind?

Similarly, if there is the appearance of something we think is good, and we wish to have it, what benefit is there in trying to gain what is just the appearance of our mind? Thus someone who is involved in acquisition and rejection has an incorrect view. This acquisition and rejection is a delusion because it's a belief in the dualism of inner mind and external phenomena, of self and others, of nirvana and samsara. We cling to belief in these dualisms, but in fact they are not two separate things. They are just one thing, the manifestation of the mind. Therefore all dualistic appearances are false and unreal.

3. *The remedy for this delusion*

(44) Through this, understanding is taught as a remedy.
(45) The understanding of nonduality is not truth.
(46) It is the conception of nonconceptuality.
(47) The understanding of emptiness gained through breaking down forms and so on,
(48) Isn't it itself a delusion?
(49) But it's taught so that attachment to things as real will cease.

The third point of correct and incorrect thinking is the remedy for this delusion. All these dualistic appearances are completely false; there's no reality to them. When we look at these dualistic appearances, we might have the thought that their nature is emptiness. However, this belief that there are no dualistic appearances is not correct because the thought that dualistic appearances do not exist is also a delusion. Shantideva explained this using the analogy of a dream. He said that one might dream that one has a child, so in this dream one will think that this dream child exists. But in actual fact there is no child there. In this dream the child might die, and then one will think that the dream child does not exist. In fact, both of these thoughts and the dream itself are delusions: the thought that the child exists is a delusion, and the thought that the child does not exist is also a delusion. Both are occurring in a dream about a child that never existed. In the same way, the thought that dualistic appear-

ances exist is a delusion, and the thought that dualistic appearances do not exist is also a delusion.

We need a remedy to remove the delusion of the dualism of rejection and acquisition. This remedy is knowing that all phenomena are appearances from one's mind, that they are illusory appearances, and that they are impure appearances arising on the foundation of the pure true nature. Because delusion is a belief in dualism, the remedy for dualism is the belief in nondualism. But the thought of nondualism itself has no reality. Because dualism has no reality, the absence of dualism has no reality either. So one needs the remedy of this thought to counteract the belief in dualism, and yet that thought itself does not have any truth due to the fact that dualism itself is a delusion.

This thought of nondualism is also false. We think, "There is no dualism," but this thought itself is a concept. If we become attached to that concept, nonduality becomes a delusory appearance. So although this idea of nonduality is a remedy for the thoughts of dualism, attachment to that thought of there being no dualism will change it into a delusory appearance.

The concept of emptiness on the coarse level of phenomena is developed through logical analysis. There are four major philosophical traditions in Buddhism (Vaibhashika, Sautrantika, Madhyamaka, and Chittamatra), of which the Vaibhashika and the Sautrantika are from the Hinayana tradition. Although there are some differences in terms of their internal explanations, both of these traditions agree that external phenomena have no reality on the coarse level and that reality is just a fabrication of the mind. But these two schools also teach that there must be something of which external phenomena are composed, and that there exists a smallest particle from which all forms are composed, and that an assembly of these particles constitutes the forms that we see. If these particles did not exist, there would be nothing for us to see. If something is divisible, it is on the coarse level of form, and therefore all external phenomena are made up of aggregations of these indivisible particles, which we could call atoms. In this way, the obvious or gross level of phenomena has no inherent reality because it is made up of all these minute particles. The Buddha taught that there is no reality to this level of phenomena because they are

actually a gathering together of many factors, like a heap or aggregation. He taught that the first skandha is composed of a collection of various factors, as are the other skandhas.

The Vaibhashika and Sautrantika schools of the Hinayana tradition use particles to describe emptiness at the gross level of phenomena. However, the Hinayana view of the existence of the smallest particle is refuted by the Mahayana Chittamatra tradition. For example, Vasubandhu presents the argument that this smallest particle must be surrounded by six other particles when it forms a phenomenon. It must have one particle on the east side, one on the west, one on the north, one on the south, one above, and one below. The particle on the east side is not going to connect with the western side of the central particle; it's going to be on the eastern side. The particle below is not going to join the central particle on the top; it's going to join below. The particle from above is not going to connect to the lower surface of the central particle, but to the upper part, and so on. Thus there are six parts to this smallest particle, which means that it also is divisible, and therefore logically there is no such thing as an indivisible particle and no reality to the idea of an indivisible particle making up external phenomena. Vasubandhu says, rather, that all external appearances are just the creation of the mind, without any externally existing ultimate particles. That is the way the Chittamatra school refutes the view of the Hinayana tradition.

By analyzing external phenomena in this way, we can gain an understanding of emptiness. But this understanding of emptiness is itself incorrect. The teachings on emptiness were given by the Buddha and the great masters in the past to counteract attachment to the reality of external forms on a gross level, attachment to the reality of forms on a subtle level, and attachment to the reality of the internal mind. So through this analysis we gain a conceptual understanding of emptiness.

This teaching by Rangjung Dorje describes the pure buddha nature and the obscuration to this buddha nature. This subject is also explained in the *Uttaratantra,* and what is taught here has essentially the same meaning as the *Uttaratantra,* but there is some difference in the

way in which the explanation is given. In Rangjung Dorje's text, the teaching is given in relation to meditation instructions and the path of the tantras, whereas in the *Uttaratantra* there is an explanation of buddha nature and the obscurations given in terms of analysis and reasoning in accordance with the Sutra path. In the *Uttaratantra* buddha nature is explained as being enclosed in a covering of incidental obscurations, and this is explained through nine similes. One of these similes is that of the body of a Buddha statue enclosed within the petals of a lotus. The body of the Buddha is present within the lotus, but it cannot be seen unless the petals are removed. In the same way, buddha nature, or buddha essence, is enclosed within desire, and although we have the buddha nature, we cannot see it. Another example is that of honey surrounded by bees; we are not able to enjoy or use that honey because of all the bees swarming around it. In the same way, we have the buddha nature, but we are not able to enjoy its benefits because it is enclosed by our affliction of anger. There are seven other analogies given in the *Uttaratantra* to explain the presence of the obscured buddha nature.

This concludes the section explaining the correct and incorrect thoughts, how delusion arises and how this delusion has no true reality, and that the thought of that delusion having no reality is also a delusion.

Question: You proved that external appearances don't really exist by deduction. Can the fact that external appearances do not exist as such be directly perceived?

Rinpoche: The absence of reality of external appearances can be proved through reasoning. Very gradually, one can get a direct insight of it, but this cannot be gained immediately. This long successive path of reasoning is the Sutra path. In the Vajrayana path, in contrast, this is seen as taking too long, and so the direct approach of looking at the essence of the mind, as in Mahamudra or Dzogchen, is employed.

Q: If there are no skandhas, how could compassion come in?

R: It is said that there is "the emptiness that has compassion as its essence." This means that if there is the absence of these five skandhas, then compassion becomes even greater. For example, if someone is asleep and dreams of a big tiger, he becomes very frightened, but there's no reason for his fear because there isn't really a tiger there. Then a clairvoyant person who can perceive the person's fear comes by and feels compassion for that person and wants to wake him up and say, "It's all right, there's no tiger. There's no reason to be afraid." If you're aware of what someone is experiencing in his sleep, you're not just going to sit there and do something to amuse yourself while thinking, "He's terrified of this tiger that isn't really there." You will wish to wake him up and to free him from that fear. In the same way, being in a state of delusion gives us a great deal of suffering and pain; so with the realization that the delusion has no real existence, one will have the compassion to free other beings from that delusion.

When we say in the teaching of emptiness that the five skandhas do not exist, we mean that something appears but it has no true reality. It's not saying that nothing appears. With the dream of the tiger, we can say that the tiger is not real, yet the tiger is seen; there is the appearance of a tiger. The nature of the mind is empty and the nature of wisdom is empty, but nevertheless, in wisdom-mind, there arises knowledge and love and compassion for beings. So even though the nature is emptiness, all these qualities of compassion and so on arise.

Q: The nature of things is emptiness, but here it is said that the understanding of emptiness is a delusion. Is emptiness an illusion?

R: Shantideva gave the following example: If one dreams that one has a child, understanding the emptiness of the dream is the remedy for the delusion of the existence of the child. Now, if one dreams that one has a child and that this child dies and one feels great sorrow, the remedy for this sorrow of this nonexistent death is also understanding the emptiness of the dream even though the child was nonexistent in the first place.

The purpose of understanding emptiness is to eliminate attachment. We have great attachment to external things and to our inter-

nal mind, and through that attachment we develop defilements and suffering and hardship. Therefore it is important to be able to eliminate that attachment. The understanding that things have no true reality will eliminate this attachment, and this brings a state of peace.

To use another classic example, if we see a rope and mistake it for a snake, we feel fear; we think this snake looks poisonous and very dangerous. There is no point in getting a club; the only way to eliminate our fear is to look at the actual nature of what we are seeing, and when we see that it is just a rope, the fear just disappears. In the same way, we have attachment, pride, anger, and so on in samsara, and the way to free ourselves from these is to see the actual true nature of things, to see that phenomena have no reality, and then all those negative qualities will just naturally be liberated.

Q: What if there is a real snake?

R: The situation where there is a real snake is not useful as an example of eliminating delusion. The example of the rope illustrates when we are in a state of delusion and then see the way things really are. If there were a real snake, then it would be beneficial to see that the snake is really a snake. In the same way, if all phenomena and defilements had a true reality, then there would be no benefit in looking into them to see their emptiness. But because phenomena do not have any inherent reality, understanding their emptiness is how we are able to be liberated.

What the Buddha saw was that beings are in the state of suffering. He thought, "Is there anything I can do to help save these beings from their suffering?" And then he saw that there was something he could do: they were in a state of delusion and he could give them teachings to eliminate their delusion. For that reason he gave the teachings on emptiness of the second turning of the Dharma wheel.

Q: The supreme emptiness is called the spontaneous liberation. I wonder whether compassion is the center of emptiness which is spontaneous liberation?

R: In the context of the normal compassion that we have when we feel compassion for someone, we ourselves also feel pain or suffering

as the nature of that compassion. If someone is very sick and about to die, we think, "Oh, they're so ill, and they're going to die," and we feel compassion. But within ourselves we feel pain and suffering. We feel compassion, but we cannot do anything about it; the sick person is just going to go on being sick and then die, so our compassion is pointless and doesn't benefit anyone. All that's happening is that both of you are sitting there suffering—the one who is dying and you who are feeling compassion—without doing the person any good.

However, when the Buddha sees beings suffering, this is the compassion of the emptiness that has compassion as its essence. The Buddha can see that things have no reality, and so he is able to teach the person who is suffering that things have no reality and that there is no need for the person to suffer. That kind of compassion has bliss as its nature because one can feel, "There's a person suffering, but I can help remove their suffering." That kind of compassion is beneficial for the person and is beneficial for oneself. Because one can feel that one is able to help them, one feels limitless joy.

It is very fortunate that phenomena have no reality, because beings are in a state of suffering; because things have no reality, beings can be liberated. So it is our good fortune that things have no reality. If there is a tiger chasing you in a dream, you can wake up because it's a dream. But if it were a real tiger chasing you, then you would be eaten. In the same way, if it were really a snake, you'd be bitten, but fortunately there's no snake there, it's just a rope. We're fortunate that if things really did exist, we would have no choice but to continue suffering. We're lucky in that things don't really exist and so we can be liberated from the suffering. We are therefore fortunate to have the understanding that all phenomena have no true nature and that if we can meditate on the nature of the mind, we can change our situation.

Q: My own life seems to be a continuing stream of real tigers and real snakes, which causes me real panic. There isn't time to stop and ask whether the tiger is real, because if you don't run fast enough it will kill you. How can you use this direct experience of fear to realize the emptiness of the situation?

R: There are many methods within the Dharma for dealing di-

rectly with problems and for eventual removal of the difficulties. For example, through the practice of Tara and doing supplications to her, one can attain the common siddhis. The common siddhis are the relative siddhis, whereas the uncommon siddhi is the ultimate siddhi, which is attaining the state of Buddhahood. So through supplication to Tara, one can deal with temporary problems by removing obstacles or fears. This is relative because when one has removed one obstacle, the next one is going to come along; we're in samsara, so there is a continuous succession of these problems and difficulties. This is a method of removing obstacles one at a time as they come up. But there is the meditation of Mahamudra, where one realizes the nature of the mind and one sees that things have no reality. When one has realized that, then one is freed from all suffering and fear.

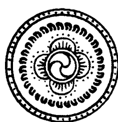
For example, when the Sixteenth Karmapa was dying, his physical body had cancer. In the video *The Lion's Roar* there is an interview with his doctor, who says that the Karmapa had a very debilitating illness involving a lot of pain and suffering, but that each time he would go to see him, the Karmapa would say, "I'm fine, I'm not feeling ill," and would be smiling. There was cancer in his physical body, but in his mind there wasn't much of an experience of the illness because he had the realization of the true nature of things. With that realization of the true nature of things there was the physical sensation of pain, but this illness and pain was not experienced by the mind that saw the true nature of things. So he was comfortable and smiling and happy.

Q: Once you are in that kind of pain, is there any way to use the opportunity of that pain to further your realization?

R: What you need to do for that, even if there is that pain, is to do meditation now. Practice with as much diligence as you can, because then you will get the result from that practice.

4

THE EXPLANATION OF BUDDHA NATURE



THERE ARE five major divisions to this text and we are in the fourth division—"The Detailed Explanation of the Teaching." In this chapter we will explore the third of the five parts of the detailed description. There are three sections to this explanation: (1) the nature of buddha nature, (2) the qualities of buddha nature, and (3) the presentation of examples.

C. The explanation of buddha nature

1. The nature of buddha nature

(50) There isn't anything that is either real or false.
(51) The wise have said that everything is like the moon's reflection on water.
(52) The ordinary mind is called
(53) The dharmadhatu and buddha nature.
(54) Enlightenment cannot improve it.
(55) Unenlightened beings cannot corrupt it.
(56) It is described by many names,
(57) But its meaning cannot be known through verbal expression.

All appearances are a duality of a perceiver and that which is perceived. These have no true reality, and so they are empty of inherent existence. Although these appearances are without reality, they are not false or wrong, because these appearances do arise.

In conventional wisdom, if something is not true, it must be false; or if something is not false, then it must be true. Something that is neither true nor false is beyond the realm of understanding of ordinary beings. The Buddha gave several teachings to explain this emptiness and appearance which in conventional wisdom seems to be contradictory. One example he used was of the reflection of the moon on the still surface of water at night. The reflection of the moon appears on the surface of the water, and a person sees the image of the moon there. If we ask, "Is there really a moon there?" the answer is obviously, "No, there isn't actually a moon in the water." Yet we cannot say that this is totally false, because an image of the moon does appear and is perceived. Thus it is neither true nor false. This is the example showing how all appearances are neither true nor false; that is, they appear but do not truly exist.

In another example, if in a dream we see a tiger, that experience of a tiger is not real; but at the same time, it is not false in that there is the appearance of a tiger. In the same way, all phenomena are not true and not false.

Since all phenomena are not true and not false, there is neither harm nor benefit. This is how all composite phenomena are. But what about the dharmadhatu and the essence of the buddhas, the buddha nature or ordinary mind? We might take the word *ordinary* in "ordinary mind" to mean the artificial, contrived mind, the mind that has fallen under the power of the defilements. But what is meant here by "ordinary mind" is this true nature or essence of the mind in its uncontrived natural state, without trying to make something that is nonexistent existent, nor trying to make something that is existent nonexistent. Instead, it means just resting in the natural state of the mind as it is, and that is the dharmadhatu, or the buddha nature. It could also be called the union of wisdom and space, where space is the aspect of emptiness and wisdom is the aspect of clarity, because

this nature of the mind is something that has no reality of its own and is therefore empty, but it also has natural luminosity.

So the natural state of the mind has luminosity, or clarity. This ordinary mind is both the dharmadhatu and the buddha nature, or buddha essence, because ordinary mind, being without any reality, has an empty nature and is therefore the dharmadhatu; it has the aspect of luminosity and is therefore also the buddha nature.

The ordinary mind is just the natural or uncontrived state or the essence of the mind. For that reason, the buddhas, bodhisattvas, and siddhas, those who are realized, are not in any way improving ordinary mind, buddha nature. The true nature of the mind remains exactly as it is. Those who are in samsara or the lower realms are not in any way creating any deterioration of this true nature of the mind. Buddha nature remains the same, but there are those who are able to realize this true nature of mind and those who have not been able to realize it. Ordinary mind, or buddha nature, is permanent and it does not change. It is said to be permanent because it is the same whether it is realized or not. Some scholars have attacked this position, saying that, in that case, this buddha nature is the same as the atman, or the eternal soul of the non-Buddhists. But it is not the same as the atman of the non-Buddhists. If it were a permanent entity, those scholars would be correct. But Rangjung Dorje says that buddha nature is not a thing, that its nature is emptiness, that it lacks reality. Something that is empty, something that lacks reality, is permanent and will never change. There is no impermanence in the state of emptiness. Therefore the ordinary mind, the buddha nature, is a state of permanence which, at the same time, does not fall into the extreme of eternalism.

The text says that buddha nature, or buddha essence, is given many different names, such as ordinary mind, dharmadhatu, and so on. Although it has many different names, we cannot understand it merely through knowing these names. The way we can understand buddha nature is through the practice of meditation and by the direct realization of it.

Dharmadhatu is a Sanskrit term that was translated into Tibetan as *chöying*. The word *dharma* in Sanskrit is derived from a root meaning "to hold." So something is held, is prevented from falling down.

When the word *dharma* was translated into Tibetan, it was translated as *chö*, which has the meaning of "to correct" or "to remedy" or "to alter." It implies that one corrects through removing faults and developing good qualities. Can the Dharma eliminate faults and develop good qualities? Yes, it can because there is the *dhatu* in the Sanskrit word *dharmadhatu*, or, in Tibetan, the *ying*, which means "expanse" or "space." When there is space, we can do whatever we want—we can sit down, we can stand up, we can walk, we can fly—because there is the space to do that. If there were no space, we would not be able to do anything. In the same way, with the dharmadhatu there is the ability to eliminate faults. If we wish to develop the positive qualities, there is the opportunity to do so because of emptiness. Thus, because of ordinary mind, we have the ability to eliminate faults and develop positive qualities. This teaching on buddha nature is given in several sutras and shastras, such as the *Uttaratantra* that teaches the definitive meaning.

The purpose of teaching buddha nature is that it eliminates five faults. The first fault that is eliminated is losing hope. One may feel that one has too many faults of body, speech, and mind and may feel incapable of overcoming these. Or one may feel that there are so many good qualities to be developed for enlightenment that one will be unable to develop them all, and so one loses hope. Buddha nature shows that one has the ability to eliminate these faults and the power to develop all the good qualities because one possesses this essence of the tathagatas.

The second fault that this teaching eliminates is the fault of maligning lesser beings. If one does not know that all beings have buddha nature, or buddha essence, then one will treat others as inferior. For example, some countries have a caste system in which those born into the lower castes are considered inferior and are not given opportunities. Or there is a difference between those who are educated and those who are uneducated. It might be said that one kind of person is able to attain spiritual accomplishment and the other is not. Or in other countries it may be thought that a man is able to attain spiritual development and a woman is not. But the teaching of buddha nature explains that all beings are the same in that they all possess buddha nature in the same measure. It is not the case that some beings are superior and have buddha nature and others are

inferior and do not have it. All sentient beings have the same amount of buddha nature and are equally able to attain Buddhahood. This teaching on buddha nature eliminates the fault of discriminating against other beings.

The third fault is holding on to a false belief. In this case it is believing that buddha nature does not exist; or, by not realizing that all things are permeated by buddha nature, by buddha essence, there is the fault of holding on to something untrue.

The fourth fault is believing that only certain beings have buddha nature. The fault of not believing in buddha nature is eliminated by this teaching.

When an ordinary being develops a few qualities, he or she will feel superior to others and think, "I have something that other beings do not have." This belief is due to not knowing about the presence of buddha nature and thinking that these few qualities are something special to oneself. The teachings of buddha nature, or buddha essence, contradict the fifth fault, which is pride in one's spiritual accomplishment.

2. *The qualities of buddha nature*

(A) The brief explanation of its nature

(58) The sixty-four qualities
(59) Of its unceasing manifestation
(60) Are taught to be a simplification:
(61) Each one of them also has millions.

Buddha nature has an unceasing, continuous manifestation of sixty-four qualities. Saying that buddha nature has sixty-four qualities is just a rough description. If one were to go into detail, each of these sixty-four qualities is said to have millions of further qualities.

(B) The detailed explanation of its qualities

(1) *The qualities of the dharmakaya*

The description of the qualities of buddha nature begins by saying that the buddha nature has the nature of emptiness and also the

nature of luminosity. Phenomena on the ultimate level are empty. But this emptiness is not nonexistence; rather, their essence is empty. This emptiness is not like the nonexistence of a rabbit's horns, or voidness, because there is also the quality of luminosity allowing for unceasing manifestation.

This unceasing manifestation, this unceasing play or transformation, is like the light rays of the sun and is described as having sixty-four qualities. Of these, there are thirty-two that are called the qualities of liberation, or the qualities of the dharmakaya, and there are thirty-two qualities of maturation that are the qualities of the rupakayas, the form kayas. The thirty-two qualities of liberation, which are the qualities of the dharmakaya, are the qualities of the mind of the Buddha. The mind of the Buddha, generally speaking, has the qualities of wisdom and love and power, and so these thirty-two qualities of liberation are concerned with the wisdom of the Buddha's mind. The Buddha has two kinds of wisdom: the wisdom of the true nature of things and the wisdom of the variety of phenomena. The thirty-two qualities of liberation belong to the wisdom of the variety of phenomena.

These thirty-two qualities of liberation are the qualities of the dharmakaya that arise when we become free from the obscuration of the defilements. They are analogous to the sun: the sun's rays can be obscured by clouds, and when the sun clears away these clouds, one can see all the qualities of the sun. When the sun clears the clouds away, it's not that the sun is newly created; the sun always has these qualities, but we cannot perceive them when they are covered by the clouds. Some of the sun's light does come to us through the clouds, but we cannot see it completely. Only when the clouds are removed can we see all the sun's qualities. In the same way, we already have all the qualities of the dharmakaya, but they are not evident because they are obscured by thoughts and defilements. The qualities manifest when the buddha nature, or buddha essence, becomes free of those obscurations of thoughts and defilements.

(a) THE TEN POWERS

(62) The knowledge of the appropriate and inappropriate,
(63) Of understanding actions and their fruition,

(64) Of natures, of aptitudes, and of aspirations,
(65) Of the paths that lead everywhere,
(66) Of dhyana and of divine sight, of the memory of previous lives, and of peace—
(67a) On the basis of these ten powers . . .

The thirty-two qualities of the dharmakaya are qualities of the mind. The first of these sets of qualities is called the ten powers, which consist of great abilities. These ten powers have very great strength and cannot be overcome by anything else. The *Uttaratantra* compares these powers to a vajra, because they are able to eliminate our own ignorance and lack of understanding and also the ignorance and lack of understanding of other beings. These ten powers are very powerful and indestructible and come from working on the path of a bodhisattva, having developed bodhichitta, and having kept all of one's bodhisattva commitments. This leads to the development of these ten powers.

The first of these ten powers is that one knows that from a particular cause there will come a particular result, or that a particular result cannot come from a particular cause. As an example, if you take wood and you light that wood, it will burn, so you could say that wood is an appropriate thing that can be burned. But if you try to light stone, it will not burn. This example is on the mundane level. In the context of Dharma, a good action is going to have a positive result of no suffering; a bad action will result in suffering and cannot result in happiness. In this way, there are all these effects, which are appropriate or inappropriate. The Buddha knows all of these results, which the shravakas do not know. The bodhisattvas have wisdom, but they do not have the clarity of the wisdom of the variety of phenomena. The wisdom of the variety of phenomena was gained by the Buddha because when he made a commitment, he did exactly as he said he would do. As a result of these actions, which developed a latency, at the time of enlightenment the wisdom arose that knows all the things that can be or cannot be.

For example, there is a type of karma that will be visibly experienced, which means that the result of that action will be experienced

within this very lifetime. There is also a second kind of karma, in which the result of an action will definitely be experienced in the very next lifetime. Finally, there is the karma that will not be definitely experienced, meaning that the result of that action is not very strong, so by applying a remedy that negative karma can be eliminated and one doesn't have to experience its result. These are the three kinds of karma of which the first power has full knowledge.

The second power is the knowledge of the results of actions. This is the knowledge that certain causes bring certain results, that there are positive actions and negative actions and these bring various results. In other words, there are particular individual relationships between causes and results.

Karma may be divided into two kinds: karma of an initial impetus and karma of completion. The first type of karma causes rebirth into a certain kind of life. The second type of karma determines the nature of that lifetime. For some beings, the initial karma may be good karma, so they are reborn into a good life, but the completing karma is bad, so that, although they have a good rebirth, they experience all sorts of suffering and hardship. On the other hand, one's initial karma could be bad and the completing karma good, so there is rebirth as an animal or some other inferior life form, but that lifetime is a happy one, with plenty of food, no illness, and so on. Then there may be those for whom both kinds of karma are bad, resulting in a lower rebirth with suffering and hardship. Finally, there could be some beings for whom both types of karma are positive, so there is a good rebirth with happiness, prosperity, and so on.

The bodhisattvas have an understanding of the working of karma, but they do not have the very subtle understanding that the Buddha has. The sutras give the example of the peacock feather, which has all the different colors arranged in circles. None of these colors and shapes is there without a cause; all are there due to the accumulation of merit in a previous life. The Buddha has the ability to know what all these causes are—the karmic cause for the yellow in the feather, the karmic cause for the green, and so on. The Buddha has this knowledge of actions and the ripening of their results because while on the path, he had conviction in the teaching of karma,

actions and their results, and therefore he was careful and attentive in his actions. As a result, at Buddhahood he had the knowledge of karmas and their results.

The third power is the knowledge of the makeup of beings. This means that the Buddha knows what the different aspirations and interests of beings are, so when the Buddha leads them into the Dharma, he knows those who are impressed with miraculous powers and those who feel no trust in miraculous powers but have faith in hearing the teachings. There are those who feel no faith in miracles or hearing the Dharma teachings but are impressed by the good or correct behavior of the teacher. Knowing the nature of beings and what is best for them, the Buddha would send, for example, his disciple Shariputra to teach those impressed by wisdom. To those who felt faith through seeing miracles, he would send his pupil Maudgalyayana, who would do miracles for them. For those who felt faith in disciplined behavior, the Buddha would send his disciple Tartrul, who had flawless behavior. So the Buddha knew what to do through knowing the nature or character of beings.

The fourth power is knowing the different capabilities of beings. Some have great understanding but little diligence; others have great diligence but little understanding; still others have both great diligence and great understanding; and so on. There are many different combinations of the five different capabilities individuals can have: understanding, diligence, mindfulness, faith, and meditation.

The fifth power is the knowledge of the different aspirations or interests of beings. Just as people have different natures and different capacities, they also have different interests. Some are interested in the Hinayana, some in the Mahayana; some are interested in wisdom, some in correct conduct, some in meditation, and so on. One has to teach beings according to what they are interested in or what they aspire to. In this way, the knowledge of people's different characters and their capabilities and aspirations—the third, fourth, and fifth powers—is very similar. But there is this internal subdivision into three kinds of wisdom. What is the cause for these three kinds of wisdom? While people were training on the path, the Buddha taught students in accordance with their capabilities, their natures, and their

aspirations and thus created the latency that, at the time of Buddhahood, became the wisdom that knows these three aspects of beings: their characters, their capabilities, and their aspirations.

The sixth power is the knowledge of the levels that lead to different paths: the Hinayana and Mahayana paths, which are the path of the shravaka, the path of the pratyekabuddha, and the path of the bodhisattva. The Buddha has the knowledge of all these paths. He knows what path one should enter and how one should follow it, what faults may arise on that path, what faults have to be eliminated, what qualities arise by following these paths, and the results of these paths. The Buddha has the knowledge of all the paths so that he can teach them to people; he also knows what paths are to be avoided.

The seventh power is knowing the various states of meditation (Skt. *samadhi*) and knowing what defilements are eliminated by them. There are also the meditations of the form realm and those of the formless realm. The Buddha knows the nature of all these different kinds of meditation, what positive qualities will arise from them, what obstacles can arise, and how to eliminate them. He knows this because while he himself was on the path, he had no bias or partiality toward any one of the paths, but he was able to apply himself with diligence to whatever path he followed, and in this way he gained the knowledge of the different paths and meditations.

The eighth power is the divine sight, or clairvoyance, by means of which the Buddha is able to see what is hidden and what is in the future. Through clairvoyance, which is a direct experience of all things in the present, the Buddha can see what is near and what is at a great distance, what is very large and what is extremely small. With this clairvoyance, the Buddha looks with love and compassion upon all beings.

The ninth power is the power of remembering the past, remembering previous lifetimes, knowing what they were and what occurred.

The tenth power is the knowledge of the final elimination of any defilement; anything that is negative has come to a complete end. This knowledge of the cessation of the defilements is called peace. The word "peace" stands for what is usually called the knowledge of

the exhaustion of the contaminations; it is the knowledge that all these negative factors have ceased. This is an aspect of the benefit for oneself, that everything that needs to be eliminated has been eliminated, and thus all the negative factors have ceased. The Buddha knows directly that for himself all these negative factors have ceased; therefore he has the power of the cessation of the contaminations. These are the ten powers through which there is benefit for oneself and benefit for other beings.

(b) THE FOUR FEARLESSNESSES

(67b) . . . there are the four fearlessnesses:
(68) Undisputed enlightenment in all phenomena,
(69) The teaching of obstacles, the teaching of the path, and cessation.

The next set of qualities are the four fearlessnesses, meaning that when the Buddha is among his retinue, he is like a fearless lion. Among his retinue, the Buddha does not feel any uncertainty or doubt, thinking, "What I'm saying might be wrong," or "I might make a mistake." The Buddha has complete fearlessness in relation to the complete perfection of benefit for oneself and other beings.

In the first fearlessness, the Buddha looks at himself and thinks, "All my faults have been eliminated." Nobody else can say, "There's one fault that you haven't eliminated." Everything that needs to be eliminated has been eliminated. This first fearlessness is called *sarvadharma-sambhodi* in Sanskrit and means that the Buddha has gained realization of the variety of phenomena.

The second fearlessness is the perfection of realization; all the positive qualities in oneself have been developed, and one can say, "All these qualities have been realized." No one can say, "There's this quality that you haven't developed." Having all qualities developed, the Buddha is endowed with the wisdom of knowing all phenomena. No one can accuse the Buddha by saying, "You don't know about this area of phenomena." The Buddha is fearless because he knows that he has the wisdom of the true nature of phenomena.

The third fearlessness of teaching the path benefits others. It is a

fearlessness of telling beings, "This is the path you must follow to get the result." No one can say, "Actually, this path doesn't help. That's just a lot of hardship for no purpose." The Buddha has this fearlessness in that he can say that if one practices this path it will bring the result, and no one can contradict him.

The fearlessness also benefits others by teaching them the obstacles to be avoided on the path. The fourth Buddha can show students obstacles to the path, and no one can say, "Well, that isn't really an obstacle to the path. It's a waste of time to eliminate that obstacle." The Buddha is able to teach beings the path and the obstacles, and he knows that none of these is a waste of time or effort. So the ability to teach people the obstacles to the path is attained through the wisdom of knowing all phenomena. One can say to people, "This is something you have to avoid, something you have to eliminate." Nobody can then come and say, "Well, you said we should abandon this, but we don't really have to. There's no great purpose in having to avoid or give up these things." It isn't the case that the Buddha thinks, "Whoops! I left one out. I forgot to tell them that they have to give that up. Oh dear, I haven't taught very well today." The Buddha has complete knowledge of what to teach. When the Buddha says that one should avoid something, he doesn't leave anything out. He also doesn't worry that somebody will be able to dispute with him or that he's made a mistake.

So there are two aspects of fearlessness which benefit oneself and two aspects of fearlessness which benefit others, making up four fearlessnesses. The reason the Buddha is shown seated on a lion-supported throne in many pictures and statues is to symbolize these four fearlessnesses, because a lion is unafraid of any other animal.

(c) THE EIGHTEEN DISTINCT QUALITIES OF THE BUDDHA

(70a) Because of those causes there are these eighteen: . . .

The eighteen distinct qualities are the result of the presence of the ten powers and the four fearlessnesses. They are called distinct because they are the qualities of the Buddha alone and are not shared by the shravakas, pratyekabuddhas, or bodhisattvas. In the *Uttaratantra*

they are described by the example of space. The five elements are earth, air, fire, water, and space. Space has its own particular qualities that separate it from the other elements. Space is distinct from the other four in that it is not mixed in with earth or water, and so on. In the same way, these qualities are distinct qualities that are not shared by anyone other than the Buddha.

These eighteen qualities are made up of four groups: (1) the six qualities of conduct, (2) the six qualities of realization, (3) the three qualities of activity, and (4) the three qualities of ultimate wisdom. The first group comprises the six qualities of conduct, which refer to conduct or behavior of the body, of the speech, and of the mind.

(70b) . . . no error, no chatter,
(71) No forgetfulness, continuous meditation,
(72) The absence of a variety of identifications,
(73) The absence of an undiscriminating neutrality,

The first of the six qualities of conduct is that there is no error or mistake in the conduct of the body. Although shravakas and pratyekabuddhas always have mindfulness, awareness, and carefulness, sometimes they can make a mistake, whereas for the Buddha a mistake never occurs; he never does anything that is not necessary. For that reason, the conduct of his body is without error. A shravaka or a pratyekabuddha might have an error in the conduct of their body by, for example, stepping on a snake.

The second quality of conduct is in terms of speech. Shravakas and pratyekabuddhas might laugh loudly, sounding like a horse neighing, or make other kinds of meaningless sounds with their voice. But this does not occur with the Buddha.

The third quality is that there is no forgetfulness by the Buddha, so he does not ever make a mistake. Time is not overlooked, so the Buddha is never late. The absence of forgetfulness is one of the behaviors of the mind.

Fourth, there is never any decline in the Buddha's meditative state. In the case of bodhisattvas, they may be able to rest in a state of meditation during meditation sessions, but when they arise from their meditation, that can be lost. There is a difference between the

meditation and the post-meditation state of a bodhisattva. By becoming familiar and habituated with resting in a meditative state, eventually the meditation is carried into post-meditation so that there is meditation in the post-meditation state. This occurs at the higher bodhisattva levels such as the eighth, ninth, and tenth levels. At the state of Buddhahood, meditation and post-meditation are completely blended together so that the Buddha always remains in a state of meditation. While the Buddha is helping beings, he is resting in the state of meditation that is never lost in the four kinds of activity: traveling to some distant place, moving about, lying down to go to sleep, and sitting down.

Fifth, the Buddha doesn't possess various kinds of conceptions or perceptions. Because of the presence of defilements in ordinary persons, different kinds of thoughts arise—some meaningful, some meaningless, and some incorrect. For the Buddha, such thoughts do not arise; his mind always looks on beings with love, and he always has the intention to benefit beings. Therefore he doesn't have these various kinds of conceptions and thoughts (Tib. *du che*), which we can also call perceptions or identifications or apperceptions.

Sixth, the Buddha is never in a state of ignorance or dullness or a neutral state where he is not aware or not understanding. He is always in a state of understanding and awareness. These are the six qualities of conduct of body, speech, and mind.

(74) An undeteriorating aspiration, diligence,
(75) Mindfulness, meditation, knowledge,
(76) And the vision of the wisdom that sees complete
liberation,

Next are the six qualities of realization. The seventh quality is the continual aspiration to teach the Dharma to beings in accordance with what they should be taught. It's not that sometimes the Buddha wishes to teach and sometimes, because it's too difficult to give those teachings to certain people, he does not. The Buddha always has the aspiration to give the Dharma to others. The eighth quality is diligence; the Buddha always possesses the motivation to give the teachings to others. He's not like us, who sometimes are diligent and

sometimes not so diligent. The ninth quality is that the Buddha always remembers his pupils. He is always aware of who is to be trained, in what way they should be trained, and at what time they should be trained. The tenth quality is that the Buddha always rests in a state of meditation. The eleventh quality is that the Buddha has the wisdom that knows all of samsara and nirvana; he has the wisdom of the nature of phenomena and the wisdom of the variety of appearances. The twelfth quality is that the Buddha possesses ultimate wisdom because he is completely liberated from defilements and their seeds.

It is often said that there are five pure skandhas, which include the pure skandha of liberation. The pure skandha of liberation is the attainment of freedom from the obscurations of the defilements and the obscurations to knowledge. Being free from these obscurations allows us to attain the state of liberation, the first pure skandha. The second pure skandha is the wisdom of knowing that this liberation has occurred, and this means that we always have this wisdom without it ever declining. This list of six qualities of realization does not contain the pure skandha of liberation, but it does contain the second skandha of the vision of this wisdom that knows liberation.

Next are the three qualities of activity, the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth qualities. The thirteenth quality is that every action of the Buddha is meaningful and all his actions benefit beings. Whether the Buddha looks or whether he closes his eyes, there is some meaning to it. All the actions of his body benefit beings. The fourteenth quality is that every word the Buddha says has meaning and benefits other beings. The Buddha never says anything meaningless or without any benefit. The fifteenth quality is that the Buddha has no pointless thoughts or motivations; in his mind there is always the knowledge of beings and love for beings, and never anything that is not beneficial. Those are the three qualities of body, speech, and mind.

(77) Every action being preceded by wisdom,
(78) And being unobscured in relation to time.

All of these activities of the body, speech, and mind of the Buddha that have been described are preceded by wisdom and followed by

wisdom. This means that if the Buddha does something, before the action occurs there is the wisdom that sees what is to be done, and when the action is completed there is still wisdom. This is unlike us: we don't properly examine things before or after we do something. Likewise, the wisdom is present before and after speech and before and after thoughts. Mindfulness, attentiveness, and awareness are always present. In this way, activities of body, speech, and mind are all preceded by and followed by wisdom.

The three qualities of wisdom are unobscured by time. This wisdom can look into the past, present, and future with no impediment. The text in Tibetan uses two similar words: "impediment" and "obstruction." These refer to being free of the obscurations, or obstructions, of the defilements and being free of the obscurations, or obstructions, to knowledge. In terms of seeing the past, present, and future without any obstruction, wisdom is free from desire and its obstructions, free from anger and its obstructions, and free from any ignorance and its obstructions. Being completely free from the obscurations of the defilements, the Buddha is able to see the past. Wisdom is also free from the obstructions to knowledge so that in seeing the past, the present, and the future, this wisdom is not subject to belief in a self or in appearances but is able to see the true nature, emptiness and luminosity. This wisdom sees only the true nature of relative phenomena and is not subject to any incorrect beliefs or any obscurations to knowledge. In this way, the wisdom is able to see the past (the sixteenth quality), the present (the seventeenth quality), and the future (the eighteenth quality) without any obstruction or impediment. Those are the three qualities of wisdom.

(79) That which has these thirty-two is the dharmakaya.

These ten powers, four fearlessnesses, and eighteen distinct qualities make up the thirty-two qualities of the dharmakaya, which are also called the thirty-two qualities of liberation. The reason they are called the qualities of liberation is that even as ordinary beings we all have all of these thirty-two qualities present within us as part of our buddha nature. They are, however, obscured by incidental stains. When we are on the path, these stains or obscurations are removed,

so we become freed from the mind poisons. When we become freed from these defilements, the thirty-two qualities become manifest. Therefore they are called the thirty-two qualities of liberation because they are displayed when we are liberated from the defilements.

This process of liberation is compared to clouds being cleared away from the sun. When clouds obscure the sun, is there still sunlight? Yes, the sun is still there. When the clouds are gone, the sunlight manifests. In this way the qualities are present and become manifest later when the obscurations are removed.

(d) THEY ARE PRESENT BUT DO NOT APPEAR

(80) In the present there is the contradiction of that.
(81) There is no certainty of it as it is.
(82) Therefore we create designations, the thoughts of the nonexistent as existent;
(83) The thoughts that arise because of that are the dependent;
(84) The absolute is not known;
(85) Thus we create our own torment.
(86) Oh! Understanding these qualities of dharmakaya
(87) To be true is the knowledge of truth.
(88) But in the present, those with little capability
(89) Reject the knowledge of truth and fabricate untruth,
(90) Follow that, and adopt it with agitation.

Having buddha nature within us, we also have all the qualities of the dharmakaya, but we do not see them. Instead we can see that we have faults and defects and we cannot see any positive qualities. In our present condition, we are not in harmony with buddha nature and we act against it.

There are two aspects to the nature of the mind: the aspect of space and the aspect of wisdom. The aspect of space is emptiness, that is, the absence of any true reality. Since beginningless time, phenomena have been without any reality, and the nature of our mind has also been without any reality. This is the space or emptiness of

phenomena, or we could say the dharmadhatu. The word *dharmadhatu* comes from *dharma* and *dhatu*, which means "space" or "realm." This dharmadhatu is the nature of our mind, but we do not see or realize or manifest it.

The second aspect, wisdom, occurs because the true nature of phenomena is emptiness and emptiness is not a void or nothingness; it also has the aspect of luminosity and wisdom. These are the thirty-two qualities of the dharmakaya. There is the unceasing display of these qualities from the dharmakaya, and this is the aspect of wisdom. So there are two aspects to our mind, space and wisdom, but we cannot see them. Basically, we do not understand our mind as it really is, and this results in uncertainty.

Lines 80 to 90 describe the three characteristics, which is a concept of the Chittamatra tradition of the Middle Way. Here they are explained according to the Shentong tradition. The first characteristic is "the absolute" (Skt. *parinishpanna*), and this characteristic is said to be the emptiness of a self and the emptiness of an external reality. The dharmadhatu, being birthless, has the characteristic of being completely true. Further, it is said that from the ground consciousness (the alaya consciousness), there is the capability for all of samsara, all of the perceptions, to arise. From this true nature there arises the second characteristic, "the dependent" (Skt. *paratantra*), which is the arising of the seven consciousnesses. So there are the consciousnesses, and then their corresponding objects—such as visual images, sounds, tastes, smells, and mental objects—arise. Both the perceptions and the consciousnesses that perceive these perceptions arise out of the absolute.

The dependent is said to be just the appearances that arise through interdependent origination (Tib. *tendrel*). So what then is the actual delusion? The delusion lies in the third characteristic called "the fabricated" (Skt. *parikalpita*). When the relative appearances have arisen, there is grasping. These appearances have arisen from emptiness, from the absolute, and so their essence is emptiness. With the grasping or attachment to these appearances, we develop a belief that things are permanent and real. From this arises ignorance,

aversion, and desire—in other words, all the defilements. With the arising of these defilements, there is the accumulation of karma and the continuation of living in samsara. This is the fabricated.

Looking at these three characteristics, or levels of relative and ultimate truth, the absolute is seen as the ultimate level of reality, and the dependent and the fabricated are seen as the relative level of reality. But sometimes the absolute and the dependent are classified as the ultimate level of reality, with the fabricated being classified on the relative level. This is because the dependent is just the arising of appearances, so this nature itself does not have any delusion.

The three characteristics are presented differently by Rangjung Dorje in this text than I have presented them here.[13] In the text the fabricated, or designated, is said to be thoughts, which see the nonexistent as existent. First, the buddha nature that exists within all beings is not seen, thus creating uncertainty. From this one conceives of something that doesn't exist; one believes the delusory appearances in this world as existing. These thoughts that take appearances as being real objects are what is meant by the fabricated. So because of not understanding the emptiness of phenomena, the obscurations of the defilements and the obscurations to knowledge arise. In the Kagyu lineage prayer called the *Dorje Chang Tungma,* it says, "The nature of thoughts is dharmakaya." Since the essence of thought is the dharmakaya, the thoughts themselves are not real. Not understanding the nature of these thoughts, one takes thoughts to be real. In terms of one's practice, by resting in meditation one finds that there are no thoughts and concepts in the true nature of mind; but instead of recognizing this, we become involved in these thoughts and grasp at them. We end up taking to be real something that is empty and has no existence.

The belief in something as real when it is actually empty gives rise to thoughts, which are part of the dependent. These thoughts are called dependent because they are dependent upon a designatory process in which the absolute is not recognized. In this text, the arising of thoughts and defilements is considered the dependent nature.

Due to the presence of the other characteristics, the absolute is not recognized by the ordinary individual. One can define the ab-

solute as being dharmadhatu or the buddha nature. It is not understood because of the presence of the fabricated and the dependent. As a result of not understanding the absolute, we become involved with illusory appearances. We have created this ourselves. Due to the grasping and involvement with illusory appearances, we feel we are sinking into the swamp of samsara.

We can illustrate these three characteristics using the example of mistaking a rope for a snake. The rope lying on the ground is the absolute. When someone comes along and sees the shape and color of the rope, that is the dependent. Then the person thinks, "That's a snake," and grasps on to that thought, which gets stronger and stronger, and the person becomes frightened. These feelings and thoughts are the fabricated.

At this point there is, in Tibetan, the exclamation *kyema*!, "Oh!," which could be a cry of either sadness or amazement. The reason it could be an exclamation of sadness is that even though beings have the buddha nature with all its qualities, they do not realize it and instead cling to illusory appearances and wander in samsara. This is completely wrong, and so *kyema* could be a cry of dismay. But it could be a cry of wonder in that, although one is involved in delusory appearances, still the qualities of the buddha nature, of the dharmakaya, are present within us.

We have all these qualities of Buddhahood, but so little control that we cannot manifest them. We have this weakness because we reject the knowledge of truth. Instead, we have created illusory appearances and become involved with them, creating the movement of thoughts.

(e) HOW TO SEE THE DHARMAKAYA QUALITIES

(91) Know it now to be what it is!
(92) And in that knowledge its powers will be obtained.

The following lines are from the *Ashimatra Devi Sutra:*

(93) There is nothing in this that has to be removed.
(94) There isn't the slightest thing that has to be added.
(95) Truly see the truth.
(96) If one sees truly, there is complete liberation.

The following lines are from the *Uttaratantra:*

(97) The element is devoid of the incidental impurities,
(98) Which have the characteristic of being divisible.
(99) It is not devoid of the unsurpassable qualities,
(100) Which have the characteristic of indivisibility.

When we are ordinary, unenlightened beings, we possess the buddha-qualities, but we cannot see them. Not only that, we do not believe in the presence of buddha nature, or buddha essence, and its qualities, but instead we believe in and take stock in the illusory appearances of the duality of a perceiver and external perceptions. In relation to the three characteristics, ignorance exists in the dependent, and the presence of buddha nature exists in the absolute. Since ordinary individuals are ignorant of buddha nature, their ignorance gives rise to the defilements. Because of these defilements, karma arises. From this karma, the effects of our actions arise as appearances. With our mind influenced by arising appearances, we have no real freedom or independence, and this is why we have what is called the dependent. In the dependent, these false appearances arise and we cling to them strongly, thinking them to be real, and that is what is called the designated or fabricated.

We have shown that these states are acquired due to ignorance and that delusion arises from it. What is necessary is to recognize things as they are, the true nature of things. It is as if we possessed a precious jewel but did not know we owned it. We need to overcome our ignorance and know that we possess buddha nature, but we can't do this through our own power alone. We need to receive the teachings of the Buddha and then recognize things as they really are. When we recognize this, we will gain the enlightened qualities.

It is taught that in the state of meditation there is nothing that needs to be eliminated and nothing that needs to be added. In terms of buddha nature and the nature of the mind, this means that there is nothing that needs to be eliminated. If we have some gold with stains on its surface, the gold itself is unstained by that surface layer and remains pure. Or if we have dirty water, the water itself is unaffected by that dirt; the clarity of the water is obscured, but the nature

or essence of the water remains pure. In the same way, although our mind is obscured by the defilements, buddha nature itself is unaffected by the mind poisons. So from buddha nature itself there is nothing that needs to be eliminated nor anything new that needs to be created. All of the qualities are already present within the buddha nature, the buddha essence. Our ordinary consciousness is the absolute, and if we correctly look at this true mind, we will have a correct, valid realization.

When we analyze and investigate buddha nature, we find that it is indivisible. All of the eight consciousnesses are absent in buddha nature, as they are incidental stains that are not part of buddha nature. Buddha nature itself cannot be divided; it is itself indivisible, and none of these stains are present in it. However, that does not mean that it is nonexistent.

How do we recognize buddha nature to be what it is? The text says, "There is nothing in this that has to be removed. / There isn't the slightest thing that has to be added." The buddha nature, although obscured, has no defects itself; it has no faults that have to be eliminated. Buddha nature, or buddha essence, already possesses all of the qualities, so there is nothing that needs to be added to it. Therefore it has no fault that needs to be removed and no quality that needs to be added. Since beginningless time, it has never had any defect, so there is nothing in the buddha nature that we have to work to eliminate. As it has all the qualities, there is no quality that has to be newly created.

We should be able to see it as something that is true or completely valid. If we can see buddha nature as being itself perfect, we will be liberated from all the thoughts and concepts that obscure it.

The Shentong view teaches that buddha nature is primordially pure and unstained and possesses all the qualities. From beginningless time we have had this true nature of the mind, but throughout time up to the present we haven't looked at it. In this lifetime, from our birth until now, we haven't looked at the nature of the mind. Instead, our mind has been turned outward, thinking about all sorts of things. If instead we looked inward at the mind, we would see, "Oh, it's just as the Buddha taught. The mind is empty." We can see for ourselves that the mind is empty, without any existence exter-

nally, internally, or in between; without any birth, abiding, or cessation. In that way we correctly see the true nature.

By listening to the teachings and contemplating them, we can gain an understanding of emptiness. But the understanding of emptiness is distant. We have studied it and we think, "All these objects and phenomena really have no existence, no reality. So emptiness is far away." Through learning and contemplation, we gain a misconception of emptiness. In meditation, we might think, "I don't have this emptiness in the mind. It is something that I have to create." There may be the feeling that we have to work very hard to gain an understanding of this emptiness or go a great distance to find it. That is a misconception of emptiness and an incorrect kind of meditation. In fact, if we look at the nature of the mind, emptiness is there; it's not far away, nor is it something that has to be newly created. Throughout time, the mind has never had any true reality. We can directly see this emptiness and its natural luminosity aspect. Because the emptiness and luminosity are already primordially present, there is nothing to be removed or added to gain clarity. It's just the nature of the mind that we can see directly.

In teachings and in debate we give the true nature of the mind various terms, such as buddha nature or dharmadhatu or emptiness. But these terms could become a kind of bondage, because they sound like something very profound and very distant from us. For this reason, the mahasiddhas gave the true nature of mind the name "ordinary mind." This name implies that it is accessible and very easy to attain, that it's not far away but naturally present. The mind with its clarity and emptiness is not a great distance away. If we look into the mind correctly, we will be able to see it. If we look at the true nature of the mind, we see the union of luminosity and emptiness, or the union of awareness and emptiness. This is the actual nature of the mind, with nothing that has to be removed or added, nothing that has to be created, nothing that is far away. To see the true nature of the mind correctly will free us from the obscurations of thoughts and defilements because these are incidental obscurations. They are like an optical illusion or mirage; they are insubstantial and do not last.

How is emptiness explained in the tradition of the Shentong?

The text says that the element is devoid of these incidental obscurations, which have the characteristic of being divisible (lines 97–98). Outer phenomena, inner consciousnesses, and all objects of perception are divisible because an outer form is divisible by direction in terms of its south, east, north, and west sides and so on. The skandha of form is divisible into its different parts, and consciousness can be divided into the different kinds of consciousnesses. In this way, all phenomena are divisible; they are therefore incidental or transitory, and thus they are empty. But what is the foundation for this emptiness? It is the buddha nature. In terms of emptiness, it means that there is no reality to phenomena. But it's not simply a question of saying that there is nonexistence, because to begin with, there is no existence. If there were existence, then there would be nonexistence. If primordially there has never been any existence, then there cannot be any nonexistence. Therefore there is neither existence nor nonexistence. So the element, buddha nature, is free from these extremes of existence and nonexistence. Whether we call them impure appearances or incidental stains, they are empty. That is the teaching of emptiness.

Next one looks at the buddha nature, or buddha essence, itself. This buddha nature is said to be free from the four extremes of existence and nonexistence.[14] Buddha nature has the aspect of space as well as wisdom. The aspect of space is emptiness free from the four extremes, which makes it indivisible. So buddha nature has the characteristic of being indivisible. But saying that buddha nature is empty or has a lack of reality would not be correct. There is also the aspect of luminosity or wisdom. Although buddha nature, or buddha essence, is empty and free from the extremes of existence and nonexistence, it is not devoid of the unsurpassable supreme qualities of wisdom, clarity, and so on. This chapter covered the qualities of the dharmakaya, how they are obscured, and how they can be seen.

Question: You said that the purity of buddha nature exists but can't be seen due to ignorance. Can it be felt? Does it have an effect?

Rinpoche: There are three proofs for the presence of the buddha nature in all beings given in the *Uttaratantra* and also in Gampopa's

Jewel Ornament of Liberation. The first is explained as follows: It's not that some people can attain Buddhahood and others cannot; anyone who practices the path can attain it. Buddhahood is not something obtained from another place; it is manifested from oneself. With the achievement of Buddhahood, all the compassion, power, and wisdom of the Buddha emanates or manifests from oneself. The fact that the Buddha body and qualities are emanated from oneself is one sign of the presence of buddha nature, or buddha essence, in all beings. The second sign is that there is no division within the true nature of phenomena; one can't say that in this part there is buddha nature and in that part there isn't, or that here there is a greater buddha nature and over there is a lesser buddha nature. It is equally everywhere. The third sign is that all beings are in the family of the Buddha. For example, if someone is in the family of a king, at some later time that person can become a king, whereas if one is not in that family line, then it's not possible for him to become a king. Some people say that there are some beings who are in the family of the Buddha so they can become buddhas, and there are some who are not. It's not like that. All beings are members of the family of the Buddha, and so all beings are able to achieve the state of Buddhahood. These are the three kinds of reasoning which establish that all beings have the buddha nature.

Q: Is the buddha nature all pervasive? Does it pervade inanimate objects like trees and chairs? If it does, can these trees and chairs become enlightened and can they practice the path to enlightenment?

R: In the Buddha's teachings, trees do not have a mind, but they have life. There's a difference between life and mind. If a flower doesn't have a mind, it won't have buddha nature. But it's like when you're dreaming; everything you see is the creation of your own mind. If you see a tree in your dream, what is that? If you see a flower, what is that? If you see water, what is that? They are all the creation of your own mind. Or you might see a friend in your dream, and you might ask, "Are you hungry?" in your dream. In your dream you may get the appearance that your friend is hungry, or maybe he says that he's not hungry, but either way he's just a creation of your own mind. It's just

an appearance. In fact, in reality there's no hunger or its absence going on. In the same way, in our waking experience, all these things are the appearance of our mind.

Our mind has buddha nature, so we can attain Buddhahood. When we attain Buddhahood, all these appearances that we see don't achieve Buddhahood; they don't have any separate buddha nature because all these are appearances of our mind. It's our mind that has the buddha nature, and all these things are just appearances in it. When we attain Buddhahood, we could say that all these appearances have achieved Buddhahood in that they are our mind. But they themselves, for example, trees and plants and so on, don't attain Buddhahood.

Q: My question also was whether external objects have any status separate from the mind. I agree that the projections of dualistic mind don't exist as external objects, that they are fabricated from our side. But the question would be, is there beyond that something separate from the mind? For instance, would a buddha have pure appearances occurring to him?

R: The impure appearances arise from the mind due to the ignorance of the mind. Malice, avarice, and all the defilements are impurities of the mind, and because of that, there are these impure appearances, the experiences of mental and physical suffering and so on. With the attainment of Buddhahood, all these impurities of the mind are eliminated, and so there are no impure appearances. The impure appearances are transformed into pure appearances. So impure appearances and pure appearances all basically arise from the mind, and there isn't anything apart from that. For example, now we're in this room—we see this room, there is the appearance of this room. Does that mean that there is nothing else existing other than this room that we perceive? Yes, because there are the latencies in the ground consciousness; there's a whole human life full of latencies in the ground consciousness. So when we go somewhere, we see and experience those things because the latencies present in the ground consciousness are ready to arise, ready to appear. For example, I am going from here to Gampo Abbey. I'm here now, so I can't see Gampo

Abbey. Does that mean that now Gampo Abbey does not exist? Yes, it does exist in my ground consciousness as a latency, so then as I experience going to Gampo Abbey, Gampo Abbey will actually appear [laughter]. This is my own personal view.

Q: Longchenpa in his *Treasury of Words and Meanings* taught that out of the ground, out of the sheath of awareness, the five lights manifest which become elements, then become objects, and then become consciousnesses. Longchenpa apparently takes the view that mind is not the objects that appear to it, but both of them arise from the ground of rigpa. Could you say that the objects come from awareness in some sense, but it's not your personal awareness?

R: In Longchenpa's view, one doesn't worry about whether external objects are mind or not mind. Instead one looks at the mind and its appearances and meditates on that. I haven't read the *Treasury of Words and Meanings* myself, but I think that Longchenpa must be speaking in symbolic terms with the five kinds of light rays forming into elements.

However, Lama Mipham wrote a commentary to *The Adornment of the Middle Way* in which he says he relied on understanding and realizing the view of Longchenpa exactly as it is, and on the basis of that he wrote his commentary, in which he says, "All phenomena are appearances of the mind." In this commentary on *The Adornment of the Middle Way,* the Chittamatra view is refuted at a certain point, particularly the Sakaravadins' True Aspectarian (Namdenpa) school. However, Lama Mipham says that, although it is being refuted here, nevertheless, in terms of relative phenomena, the True Aspectarian view that all phenomena are just the mind is absolutely correct. This is the view that one has to understand, and Mipham goes into detail about what that view is, why one needs to understand it, and the faults of not knowing it. Then he says, "In particular, those practicing Mahamudra and Dzogchen must absolutely understand this view that all phenomena are mind, and if they don't understand it, they will not progress."

In this explanation of the Chittamatra True Aspectarians, there are three subgroups. "The view of nondual variety" is that one per-

ceiver perceives a simultaneous variety of percepts. "The half-egg view" is that, just as the two halves of an egg join together, there is one perceiver and a singular percept. "The view of equal number of percepts and perceivers" is that there are the same number of perceivers as there are percepts. Lama Mipham's conclusion is that the view of Shantarakshita, who wrote *The Adornment of the Middle Way*—that there are multiple perceiver-percepts—is correct. Therefore, that's the view we should have.

Q: I have heard that Tsong Khapa in his *Eight Difficult Points* said that one point that's difficult to understand is that external phenomena do exist. And I know now that this is not your opinion. Could you explain why Tsong Khapa would say that external phenomena do exist?

R: In his teachings Tsong Khapa said that there are eight things that he could understand that other scholars had not been able to understand. Other scholars—for example, Gorampa, Karmapa Mikyo Dorje, and Lama Mipham—disagree, saying that these are eight arbitrary false qualities, not special qualities at all. Also in Tsong Khapa's view there are three types of Middle Way: the Yogachara Middle Way, the Svatantrika Middle Way, and the worldly Middle Way, or common worldly knowledge associated with Middle Way. Tsong Khapa says of the Yogachara Middle Way, "No, it's no good at all because it's got the Chittamatra view in it." Tsong Khapa didn't like the Chittamatra at all, and the Yogachara Middle Way has a lot of Chittamatra in it, so he said get rid of that Middle Way. But the Middle Way that Tsong Khapa thought was best was the Middle Way that fits with the established worldly view. He says, "If you have a pillar, then this pillar is not completely empty of being a pillar. There is a pillar. There is an absence of reality to that pillar, but the pillar does exist. There is a pillar; it's devoid of reality, but it's not devoid of being a pillar." Some scholars then criticize him, saying, "If you still say there is a pillar, how can you deny that the pillar has reality? If you deny the pillar's reality then you must be denying that there is a pillar." But Tsong Khapa says, "No, you can deny that the pillar has any reality but still affirm that there is a pillar." So that is Tsong Khapa's

view. Lama Mipham wrote a commentary called *Torch of Certain Knowledge*, in which he proposed eight questions or eight commentaries. One of the things he spends a lot of time on is attacking this view of Tsong Khapa that the pillar is devoid of reality but not devoid of being a pillar. Lama Mipham says, "It doesn't accomplish anything if you say, 'There's still a pillar, it's just devoid of a reality of being a pillar.' That's like saying, 'A yak doesn't have rabbit horns on its head.' That doesn't prove anything."

Q: I don't understand how phenomenal objects are merely the mind. Could you present it in a simple way?

R: Great scholars in the past, such as Dharmakirti, have given good proof for this. To use Dharmakirti's reasoning of clear cognition, we have this cup, and we can clearly perceive this cup. This cup is there, but why do we say that there is a cup there? The only reason is that we see it with our eyes; we see this cup and say it is there. Who sees that cup? It is the mind. This cup appears to one's own mind. If I see a tree, the only reason there's a tree there is that my mind is perceiving the tree. And there's a cloud. Why would I say there's a cloud there? The only proof there is of a cloud over there is that it's appearing to my mind. To establish the existence of anything, the only proof you have is that it's appearing to your mind. There is no other proof of its existence. You think there's an object because the mind is seeing it, or the mind is hearing it, or the mind knows of it. You can't say, "Well, here's an object that the mind does not know of, does not see or hear." There isn't such a thing.

Q: If all objects were merely the mind and the Buddha wanted a deluxe car, say a Rolls-Royce, he'd be able just to wish for a Rolls-Royce and it would appear. In other words, we would be able to control the appearance of phenomenal objects if they were merely the mind. But since no one can demonstrate this type of control over the appearance of phenomenal objects, we have to say that this refutes Dharmakirti's belief.

Second, if objects are merely the mind, then we would not need the six sense bases, the six sense organs, the six sense consciousnesses,

and so on. We would need only the mind. Now you may object and say, "In the Buddha's wisdom of the knowledge of the variety of phenomena, he doesn't have the ayatanas or dhatus, but he's still able to see all these objects without these ayatanas and dhatus," but just saying that doesn't establish it. The Buddha has to appear and has to demonstrate this knowledge, for example, saying, "I can see in California this person is now doing this," and then we could call them on the phone and check it out or something. Those are just two reasons why we won't accept his particular point of view.

R: To answer the first question, we can't transform or change appearances. If we have a dream, the appearances are nothing but the appearances of our own mind. We might say, "I'm going to dream about such and such a thing," but we can't do it. If we have a dream that we're going to have a Rolls-Royce, we have a dream, but we don't have a Rolls-Royce. The Buddha can transform appearances for himself, but he can't transform the appearances of the minds of others. He can't switch one person's latencies with another's. If one person reads a book and then knows what's in the book, that person can't give that knowledge in the book to somebody else, saying, "I've read that book, and so now you know what's in the book." That can't happen. The two people each have their own latencies and appearances. For that reason the Buddha can't cause a transformation of the world.

As for your second question, being able to do something miraculous and establishing something through reasoning are different. Someone can go through a process of reasoning, give this reason and that reason, and prove something. Listening to that one might think, "Ah yes, that seems to be right. That makes sense; he's proved that logically." That's one way of establishing something. On the other hand, doing something miraculous is different. There is a cause behind the appearance of each single thing. It's not like one smokes cannabis and then sees various unpredictable things. The appearances of the mind don't work in that way. There are all the karmas and latencies accumulated through previous lifetimes, and these result in specific appearances, which appear in a certain progressive order. In that way, there is the arising of the skandhas, the dhatus, and the ayatanas. So they all have a reason why they appear.

Q: Rinpoche, I'm not sure what the relationship is between buddha nature, the alaya, and the alaya consciousness.

R: The term *alaya* is used in different ways in different contexts. Sometimes it's used to mean the buddha nature, and sometimes it's used to mean the ground where the latencies of ignorance accumulate. Basically, Rangjung Dorje says that the purity of the mind is buddha nature, or buddha essence, and not recognizing that purity, that true nature, is the alaya. This is not a kind of developed state; it's just on the level of appearance. Not recognizing the emptiness and luminosity of the true nature of the mind becomes very intense, and because of the latencies and so on, the luminosity aspect increases so that it becomes hills, rocks, solid objects, and so on.

It's very good to hear the teachings, contemplate them, and talk about them, because forty years ago in America, there wasn't even one person who said, "Everything is just an appearance of the mind," and now there are about forty or fifty. Just give them another forty years and the majority of people will be saying, "Everything is an appearance of the mind."

Q: Is dharmadhatu the emptiness and buddha nature the luminosity aspect of mind?

R: In fact, the dharmadhatu and buddha nature are the same; they cannot be separated. They are the same with two different names. If you were describing a conch, you would say the conch is white in color. Then you could also say a conch is round. When you're talking about the conch you say in terms of its color, it's white, and in terms of its shape, it's round. In actual fact, the roundness and the whiteness of the conch are inseparable. In the same way, in talking about dharmadhatu and buddha nature, when talking about the emptiness aspect we say dharmadhatu, and when talking about the luminosity aspect we say buddha nature. But in fact there is no difference; you cannot really separate the two.

Q: I wonder whether we are not quite often in a natural state of mind which is buddha nature, for instance, when we are really selfless, when we don't know it. I think we are much more in it than we even know.

R: The explanation of buddha nature given in this text is somewhat different from that in other texts. In other teachings, buddha nature, or buddha essence, is made out to be something very profound, very deep, very far away. But in this text, the teaching of buddha nature is related to meditation and to the way that the mind actually is because buddha nature is already there in the mind. If we look into the mind, it will be seen that it is very close but we haven't realized it. There are two approaches to realizing buddha nature. There is the approach through learning, contemplation, and reasoning, and then there is the approach of experience through meditation. In the first approach, buddha nature and its qualities and its luminosity is presented as something very far away; whereas in the approach of Rangjung Dorje, which emphasizes meditation, it is something that is in the mind and can be very easily realized.

Q: If by removing the stains, buddha nature is simply revealed and manifested, why in the practice is there so much emphasis on accumulating merit and right conduct?

R: To attain the effect of Buddhahood there have to be causes for this effect. There is a cause, and there are accompanying conditions for attaining the goal of Buddhahood. The cause is buddha nature, and the accompanying conditions are accumulating merit, accumulating good karma. An analogy is planting a seed. In order to grow a flower, one needs a flower seed. So the seed is the actual cause from which the flower will come. We don't ask, "What's the point of having water and earth and compost and sunlight? There's no point to it because the real cause is the seed." If we do not believe in accompanying conditions, and we keep the seed wrapped up in paper somewhere in a drawer, we're never going to get a flower.

Q: Rinpoche, one of the ten powers is knowing the interest or aspiration of sentient beings, which you said was attributable to what the Buddha had accomplished along the path. I was puzzled by that because you also said that all thirty-two of these qualities were not produced but were ever-present.

R: It's true that these qualities are all naturally part of the buddha nature, that we have them as a part of ourselves. But theymanifest only

at Buddhahood, so it's only the Buddha who manifests these qualities through directly seeing the dharmata, the nature of phenomena. But certain favorable factors are also needed, such as the gathering of the accumulations. Therefore one could say that these powers do exist, but for this power to manifest on Earth certain things need to be done, such as following the law of karma while on the path or carrying out actions in accordance with people's aspirations while on the path, and so on.

Q: Rinpoche, could you say a little more about the elimination of the concept of suchness? For example, what happens at the first bodhisattva level? Is there some kind of realization of suchness that is then progressively worked through in the ensuing bodhisattva levels?

R: On the first bodhisattva level, there is direct insight of seeing the true nature of reality. Before that, on the paths of accumulation and application, there is just the aspiration to see the true nature. Then when that actually occurs, that's the first bodhisattva level. In this bodhisattva level, when one is resting in meditation, one has this direct insight of the true nature, and in the post-meditation period, one is seeing phenomena but seeing them as an illusion. So at that time there is the concept of the true nature. During meditation, one is thinking, "This is the true nature; I am seeing the true nature," and in the post-meditation phase one is thinking, "That was the true nature; I have seen the true nature." They are still concepts; one is seeing the true nature but, ultimately speaking, there is still something subtle to be removed. So this thought of the true nature is like a very subtle grasping at a concept.

Q: Rinpoche, how can we use the six consciousnesses in order to lean more into the truly existing nature?

R: The six consciousnesses are in opposition to the truly existing nature because you have, for example, the sixth consciousness in which the defilements arise. That can be classed as being the obscuration of the defilements. The five sensory consciousnesses are without grasping, so they could be classed as the obscuration to knowledge. These six consciousnesses are like ignorance which pre-

vents the realization of the true nature, or the absolute. As for the five sensory consciousnesses, they are classed as the dependent, whereas the mental consciousness, the sixth consciousness, is classed as the fabricated; it is very strong and has all the thoughts based on what the five sense consciousnesses perceive. In terms of the six consciousnesses, you don't see the absolute; when one does see the absolute, then the fabricated is eliminated. So what happens is that the dependent arises like an appearance, an embodiment of emptiness, the one form of emptiness.

Q: When we receive ordinary-mind transmission, my understanding is that it's brought about through sensory impact, so there does seem to be an aspect of sensory awareness that can literally and metaphorically bring us to our senses.

R: What you say is correct. In ordinary-mind transmission one has direct recognition of the nature of the mind. But normally we're not looking inward at the nature of the mind but looking outward. In the Sutra tradition there is a long, gradual process of looking at appearances and coming to an understanding of the nature of the mind. But in the Mahamudra tradition and the Dzogchen tradition, there is the direct recognition of the nature of the mind itself, so that one focuses on that rather than on the mind turned outward toward illusory appearances. In terms of the mind, there is the deluded aspect and the undeluded aspect. When one is doing meditation on the ordinary mind, one is not focusing on the illusory aspect of the mind but on the actual nature of the mind.

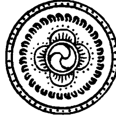
Q: I've heard from some teachers that the first moment of pure sensory perception is an experience of ordinary mind. Is that true? In other words, every time you are resting purely in your senses without the pollution of the fabricated, is that an experience of the absolute?

R: It's not quite like that. The sensory consciousnesses are described in the Pramana as being nonconceptual, and so they really belong to the dependent nature. The direct recognition of ordinary mind is done by the sixth consciousness, the mental consciousness.

When we analyze this with reasoning, there are the eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body consciousnesses and the mental consciousness. But in meditation, when we are looking at the nature of the mind, there aren't these different consciousnesses. In meditation, if we look for the eye consciousness, we can't find it. If we look for the ear consciousness, we can't find it, and it is the same with the other consciousnesses. Rather we are looking directly at the nature of the mind itself, and at that time there is no distinction between these different consciousnesses. That's when we get this direct recognition of the ordinary mind. In the first instant of sensory experience there is no ordinary mind. If it were there, in the first instant, why have we become deluded in the next instant? Didn't we do any meditation in the first instant? So the ordinary mind doesn't appear in the first instant; otherwise why would we be deluded in the next instant?

The analytical study is very complex, with many divisions and classifications, whereas meditation is like the uncomplicated yogi, in that we simply look at the nature of the mind. We can look at these different pieces of fruit on this plate and take one of them and say, "It's yellow; it's kind of square." But we can't say there is a yellow separate from that square or a square separate from that yellow. It's just one thing. But if we're going to be complicated and analytical, then you can look at it and think, "Right, there's a yellow bit," so you take the yellow off. Then we think, "There's a square shape," so that's separate, and so we can divide it that way. But really, of course, it's all just one thing. In the same way, when we analyze the consciousness, we can say, "Well, yes, there's something that is looking and it sees; and there is something that hears, and there is a hearer," and so on, making many distinctions. But when we are sitting and meditating, those distinctions aren't there. It's all mind and appearance, and that's all there is.

5
THE QUALITIES OF THE RUPAKAYAS



WE HAVE ALREADY discussed the thirty-two qualities of liberation that are the qualities of the dharmakaya. There are also the thirty-two qualities of maturation that are the qualities of the form kayas (Skt. *rupakaya*); they will be described in this chapter. This discussion is broken into three sections, the first of which is the nature of these qualities.

(2) The qualities of the rupakayas

We have already seen that there are the ten powers and the four fearlessnesses and so on, and through these, there is the attainment of the wisdom of the nature of phenomena and the wisdom of the variety of phenomena. The wisdom of the true nature is related to oneself. The wisdom of variety is the wisdom that is able to see all the aspects of relative phenomena and is related to other beings. So there are these two kinds of wisdom. The Buddha's wisdom that knows things as they are results in the development of compassion and love for all beings. One's wisdom does not cause pride, so one does not think, "I am special because I have this knowledge." Instead, wisdom results in love and compassion toward all beings. Due to that wisdom and compassion for all beings, the methods to help beings arise, which are related to the second wisdom of the variety of phenomena. So from the dharmakaya, the qualities of the rupakayas arise to benefit beings.

From the dharmakaya arise two kinds of rupakayas: the sambhogakaya and the nirmanakaya. These appear in relation to the different kinds of beings that need to be taught. The sambhogakaya means "the body of complete enjoyment" in that there is complete enjoyment of the Dharma. So the sambhogakaya teacher is able to give the vast and profound Dharma teachings. The sambhogakaya pupils are able to understand all these teachings even though they are very profound and very vast. Thus there is this perfect enjoyment of the Dharma teachings because the teacher gives these vast and profound teachings and the pupils are able to comprehend them. The pupils who are able to receive teachings in the sambhogakaya are only the bodhisattvas on the pure bodhisattva levels. These teachings are given continually only in the pure realms. Ordinary beings are not able to comprehend these deep and vast teachings nor go to the pure realms. So for ordinary beings to receive teachings there is the supreme nirmanakaya.

The sambhogakaya is endowed with the valuable possessions of whatever is necessary to train other beings. These endowments are called the five certainties of the sambhogakaya.[15] In the sambhogakaya there are only teachings of the Mahayana, there is a retinue of only bodhisattvas, and the teachings are given continuously. For impure students there is the nirmanakaya because they cannot meet and learn from the pure manifestation of the sambhogakaya. In the nirmanakaya different kinds of people are taught various kinds of teachings, perhaps the provisional meaning or perhaps the definitive meaning. Also, different teachings are given at different times. In other words, different things are accomplished by the nirmanakaya to benefit the impure pupils.

In the nirmanakaya, there are pure and impure pupils because some people will have faith and trust in the supreme nirmanakaya, who in our times is the Shakyamuni Buddha, and some will not. There are also those who are able to practice the Dharma and those who are not. There are those who have different levels of understanding of the Dharma. Because there are many people who did not have conviction in the Buddha and his teachings, the Buddha did not

teach only the ultimate teachings of the Mahayana but gave a variety of teachings, both provisional and definitive. To lead those with little faith in the nirmanakaya and the Dharma teachings, the Buddha gives teachings that are not the final true teaching but are provisional teachings that will serve for that time and will eventually lead those people toward the final or true (definitive) teachings. These are the different kinds of teachings given by the supreme nirmanakaya. The activity of the nirmanakaya is said to be more profound than the sambhogakaya because it teaches so many different levels of beings. However, in terms of the actual Dharma teachings that are given, the nirmanakaya is considered to be inferior to the sambhogakaya because it also teaches the provisional teachings.

(a) THE NATURE OF THE THIRTY-TWO QUALITIES OF MATURATION OF THE RUPAKAYAS

(101) In that element there is the nature of the two form kayas:
(102) The thirty-two major signs and the secondary.

The dharmakaya has thirty-two qualities of liberation, and the two rupakayas (the sambhogakaya and nirmanakaya) have thirty-two qualities of maturation. They also have eighty secondary physical characteristics of the body of a buddha which result from his extensive practice on the path. These include such signs as the ushnisha (the protuberance on top of the head), the image of the wheel on the palms of the hands and the soles of the feet, and so on. These distinctive qualities are possessed by the Buddha alone and are the result of practice on the path, and so they are called the qualities of maturation.

(b) THE QUALITIES OF BODY

(103) Those qualities that are attained are one's own body.
(104) The body is not created by self, Fortune, Shiva,
(105) Brahma, external real particles,

(106) Or by elements beyond sensory perception.
(107) When the impure development as the five senses,
(108) The perceiver, and the perceived is purified,
(109) At that time the name "attainment" is applied.

How are these qualities attained? They are attained in one's own body, so it is one's own body that has these qualities. But where does this body that gains these qualities come from? According to the views of the tirthikas, the non-Buddhist traditions, there is a creator who has made the body. Generally in the tirthikas' traditions, there is the belief in the atman, the self, which has existed primordially. So there is a belief in the "I," and therefore there is grasping to an "I." Really this atman has no existence, but in the tirthika view this atman exists primordially, and due to that, the body is a creation of the atman and the mind is a creation of the atman. So the tirthikas state that it is the atman that is the creator. There are many different kinds of tirthikas; for example, in the Bön tradition in Tibet, there is belief in what is called Fortune.[16] Fortune is the creator of the body. Fortune is what maintains everything in the world as being good, so the Bön look upon this Fortune as the creator. There are other beliefs in different creators, like those who believe that Ishvara, or Shiva, is the creator of the world. There are those who are called the Naked Ones, who don't wear clothes and who follow the teachings of one who is called the Jina, and therefore they are called Jains. They believe that Brahma created the world.

In the Hinayana Buddhist tradition, there are eighteen different schools, each with certain differences of view and conduct. Here we will look at the traditions of the Vaibhashikas and the Sautrantikas. The Vaibhashikas explain that the body is created from externally existing atoms. The Sautrantika view is a little different. They say that all the appearances that we see appear to the mind, so that whatever is perceived is an aspect of the mind. There is the appearance of the body or of things, but what one doesn't see is the actual body or the actual thing itself. The actual body or thing is concealed or beyond. There is the image of the phenomenon that appears to the mind, but beyond that, behind that, there is the actual phenomenon made of

atoms, which we cannot see directly. So we don't perceive the body directly; what we see is just an image of the body in the mind; the actual body is behind that, beyond that, and is composed of atoms.

However, Rangjung Dorje's text says the body is not made by Fortune, is not made by Shiva or Brahma, is not made from atoms, nor is it these imperceptible forms. But he doesn't say why not. Usually, if you say something is wrong, then you should explain why and give a reason. But here the text doesn't give any reason; it just says they are wrong and then goes on to explain the Karma Kagyu tradition.

What is the view in our own tradition? In the impure development of the perceiver and percepts of the five senses, the mind has the five consciousnesses—the consciousnesses of the eye, the ear, the nose, the tongue, and the body—the visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, and tactile consciousnesses. These consciousnesses become both the aspect of perceiver and the aspect of percept, that which is perceived. So for the consciousness there is something that is perceived—there is a house, a mountain, a rock, and so on—and also for the consciousness there is the one who is looking at the house, at the mountain, and so on. The consciousness becomes these two aspects. This is an example using the visual consciousness, and it's the same for all of the other sensory consciousnesses, in terms of sound and the perceiver of sound, and so on. In this way, there is the development of the consciousness into perceiver and percept. Then due to the impure latencies, all the impure phenomena that are perceived arise. Because of the perceiver-percept split and the impure latencies, there arises the perception of form, of the body, and so on. When these impure perceptions are purified, there is the attainment of the forms of the rupakaya.

During the phase of impurity, these five senses are in an impure form, and so all the various illusory appearances arise and are mixed with the mind poisons and so on. But when the five senses become purified, the form kayas appear from them. This is where the rupakayas originate; they are not newly created, nor do they come from somewhere else, nor are they created by anyone else.

(C) THE PURITY AND IMPURITY OF THE RUPAKAYAS

(110) Therefore, the purified nadis, vayus, and bindus
(111) Are the pure form kayas;
(112) The unpurified are the impure form kayas.

It is said that these qualities of maturation arise from the body. When the body is created, there exist within the body the subtle channels (the nadis), within which the subtle winds (the vayus) move. The movements of the subtle winds allow for the various movements of the body. Due to these subtle winds, there are the subtle essences (the bindus) that can move through the body, which then result in feelings of pleasure, unpleasant feelings, the presence or absence of physical qualities, and so on. This movement of vayus and bindus in the subtle channels causes physical movement in the body as well as feelings and thoughts at the impure level of ordinary (unenlightened) beings. When they are impure, they manifest as the appearances of the ordinary body. When the nadis, vayus, and bindus are purified, they manifest as the qualities of the rupakayas.

Based on the body, there are the nadis; based on the nadis, there are the vayus; and based on the vayus, there are the bindus. Therefore on the impure level, internally there are the nadis, vayus, and bindus, and externally there are the five senses and the perceptions of illusory appearances. When the nadis and vayus are purified, then the pure form kaya, the rupakaya, is attained; one's body becomes the rupakaya. But if the winds and channels are not transformed but just left as they are, then one's body will remain in the impure state, which is one's ordinary body.

So thus far, the text has described how the buddha nature, or buddha essence, is present within all beings and also that the buddha nature has the qualities of the dharmakaya and of the rupakayas, the dharmakaya being present in the mind and the rupakayas being present in the body. Although these qualities are present, they are not manifest.

3. *The presentation of examples*

(A) The example of a jewel

(113) For example, the qualities of an encrusted
(114) Beryl are not evident.
(115) When it is cleaned with rough material and caustic soda solution,
(116) And cleaned with vinegar and woolen cloth,
(117) And cleaned with pure water and Benares cotton,
(118) Purified, it becomes the jewel that fulfills all needs and desires.

Next the text presents the example of a jewel encrusted with dirt. In order to make the jewel visible, one uses at first a very rough cloth of yak hair and salty water to remove the obscuring layer. Having eliminated the coarser layer, one then uses a softer cloth, like felt cloth, and vinegar. For the final cleaning, one uses just pure water and some soft Benares cotton. Through this process, the jewel becomes completely cleaned and visible.

This analogy describes what it is like to be an ordinary being and what the attainment of Buddhahood is like. The blue beryl or aquamarine is a pure jewel, but when it is in the ground it cannot be seen because it is encrusted by earth and rocks. This teaches that there is buddha nature that is obscured and can be purified, and with that purification, Buddhahood is attained.

(B) The meaning of the example

(119) In the same way, in order to cleanse
(120) The triad of klesha, knowledge, and meditation encrustations
(121) From the beryl of the mind,
(122) There is the perfect cleansing of accumulation and application,
(123) The seven impure bhumis, and the three pure bhumis.

One has the beryl of the mind, the buddha nature, which is obscured by three levels of obscurations that have to be removed. The buddha nature has the qualities of the dharmakaya and of the rupakayas, which do not manifest because of these obscurations. What are the three levels of stains obscuring the buddha nature, or buddha essence? First is the obscuration of the defilements (kleshas), second is the obscuration to knowledge, and third is the obscuration to meditation.

The first of these obscurations, the obscuration of the defilements, is defined in the *Uttaratantra* as being the thoughts of miserliness, attachment, anger, deception, pride, envy, and desire: all of these constitute the obscuration of the defilements. The second obscuration, the obscuration to knowledge, is described as being triplistic thought, that is, believing in the subject, the object, and the action that takes place between the subject and the object. Then there is a clinging to the belief that these three are real. In terms of the subject, there is the belief that there really is a subject, that it's real; in terms of the object, one thinks that there really does exist an external object, that the object is real; and in terms of the action, one thinks that there is truly an action, that the action is real. This triple belief constitutes the obscuration to knowledge, but in itself it does not engender the defilements or attachment to the self or aversion to others. It is merely a belief, and by itself it is not nonvirtuous, negative, or bad. But it is classified as a state of ignorance because it prevents the realization of the wisdom that dispels illusory appearances and realizes the true nature. This is one difference between the obscuration of the defilements and the obscuration to knowledge.

A second difference between them is that the belief in the self of an individual is the obscuration of the defilements, while the belief in the solidity of phenomena is the obscuration to knowledge. The belief in the self is the view directed at the skandhas or, as it is called in the text, the view of what is destructible or that which is destroyed. One looks at the five skandhas thinking that they constitute a self. This creates the idea of "I" and "mine," which then leads to the thought, "This is something good for me, I want it," and so desire arises. Or one might think, "This is harmful," and then aggression

and anger arise. In this way, the belief in the self of an individual leads to the obscurations of the defilements. In addition to the belief in the self, one may hold the belief that phenomena are real and not understand their nature to be emptiness. They appear to be truly existent, and one fails to realize their emptiness. This can be called the belief in the three aspects of subject, object, and action, or one can call this the obscuration to knowledge.

The third obscuration is the obscuration to meditation, the obscuration to the entry into equanimity. Certain factors, such as agitation or instability of the mind, stupor and dullness of the mind, and so on, act as obstacles to meditation. These are the three obscurations to the buddha nature, which correspond to the encrustations of the beryl given as an example in the text.

Different explanations have been given by great scholars in the past concerning when these obscurations are removed. Some scholars present the five paths: the path of accumulation, the path of application, the path of vision, the path of meditation, and the path of no more learning. The first two paths—of accumulation and application—are described as the stage of an ordinary being. The path of vision and the path of meditation are the stages of the bodhisattva levels. Of the ten bodhisattva levels, levels one through seven are classed as the impure bodhisattva levels, and the highest three as the pure bodhisattva levels. When are the obscurations removed in relation to these bodhisattva levels? According to one explanation, for ordinary beings on the paths of accumulation and application, it is only the most evident aspects of the obscurations that are eliminated, so that in fact the obscurations of defilements and of knowledge are not eliminated while one is an ordinary being on these two lower paths. They are eliminated during the third path on the bodhisattva levels. From the first to the seventh bodhisattva levels, the impure bodhisattva levels, the obscuration of the defilements is eliminated. On the eighth, ninth, and tenth bodhisattva levels, the pure bodhisattva levels, the obscuration to knowledge is removed. That is one explanation. Another explanation says that on the impure bodhisattva levels, one to seven, the coarser or stronger aspects of both the obscuration of defilements and the obscuration to knowledge are

eliminated, and on the pure bodhisattva levels, the finer aspects of these obscurations are eliminated.

There has been a lot of argument on this subject, but here Rangjung Dorje just presents the general view and leaves it at that. Some teachers feel that they need to show what the correct view is; they establish that and then criticize and refute other people's views. For example, as I mentioned, Tsong Khapa wrote a commentary to *Entering the Middle Way,* called *The Illumination of the View,* in which he said that he had eight special qualities that nobody else understood. Then Gorampa wrote his commentary called *Eliminating the Bad,* in which he enumerated the wrong things that Tsong Khapa had said. Gorampa said, "So much for your eight special qualities; instead you've made 108 mistakes." Then people would go back and refute Gorampa, and so on. However, Rangjung Dorje didn't get into that kind of thing. But Mikyo Dorje, the Eighth Karmapa, wrote criticisms refuting the views of Sakya Chogden, Taranatha, and Tsong Khapa. Later on, Sera Jetsun wrote a text called *The Meteorite of Sky-Iron Hammer,* which was a refutation of Gorampa, and another one called *Adornment of the Views of Nagarjuna,* which refuted the Eighth Karmapa Mikyo Dorje. Then Lama Mipham refuted Tsong Khapa, and after that, someone from Amdo called Rabsel wrote a text criticizing Lama Mipham. Then other scholars defended Lama Mipham against what Rabsel had said. So there have been lots of people criticizing each other.

A great deal has been written about when the obscuration of the defilements and the obscuration to knowledge are removed, but here Rangjung Dorje just presents his own view and doesn't object to or criticize anyone else's view. He says that the obscuration of the defilements is removed when one is on the paths of accumulation and application, and the obscuration to knowledge is removed when one is on the seven impure bodhisattva levels. The obscuration to meditation is removed on the three pure bodhisattva levels.

The order in which the obscurations are removed is as follows: first, the obscuration of the defilements; second, the obscuration to knowledge; and third, the obscuration to meditation. The text states

that they are removed in order of their coarseness. The first one, the defilements, is the coarsest and the easiest to remove. As for the remedies to be applied, they are in order of increasing subtlety, just as the obscuration being removed becomes subtler. First there is the obscuration of the defilements and its remedy, then there is the subtler obscuration, the obscuration to knowledge, and when that is removed there is the obscuration to meditation, for which the subtlest remedy is applied. So the stronger remedy is for the stronger obscuration, the medium remedy for the medium obscuration, and the subtlest remedy for the subtlest obscuration.

(c) *The elimination of incorrect concepts*

(124) When incorrect thought
(125) Encounters correct thought,
(126) Like two sticks being burned, there is liberation from thoughts.
(127) There is liberation from four: from thoughts of elimination,
(128) Remedy, the true nature, and attachment to the concept of a result.

How can two different kinds of conceptualization be eliminated? First there is incorrect conceptualization, for which the remedy is the realization of the true nature of phenomena. When correct understanding and incorrect conceptualization are brought together, it's as if they fight each other. What is meant by "correct understanding" is conceptual understanding through reasoning and analysis. Long ago, before matches were invented, people had to light fires by rubbing two pieces of wood together until fire was produced, at which time both of the sticks would burn up. In the same way, when incorrect and correct thought are put together, they fight it out and keep on fighting until, in the end, not only the incorrect thought but also the correct thought vanishes, just like the sticks being burned up. Finally no thought, no conceptualization is left at all.

Through this process, four kinds of conceptualization are elimi-

nated: (1) the concept of what is eliminated, (2) the concept of the remedy, (3) the concept of the true nature, and (4) the concept of the goal. First, the concept of what is to be eliminated and the concept of remedy are brought together and eliminated on the level of the path of accumulation and the path of application. Then from the first bodhisattva level to the seventh bodhisattva level, there is the concept of tathata, the true nature, so that in a period of meditation, the person has direct insight of dharmata, the true nature of phenomena. In the period of post-meditation, the person is aware of appearances as illusions. From the first bodhisattva level to the seventh bodhisattva level, the concept of the true nature is eliminated. Finally, on the three highest bodhisattva levels, the concept of the result is eliminated. In this way these four concepts are removed.

(D) *There is no change in the true nature*

(129) At that time, the flowers of the physical signs blossom
(130) In the one who has the body of space.
(131) The three phases of impurity, of both purity and impurity,
(132) And of complete purity are, respectively:
(133) The phases of beings,
(134) Of bodhisattvas, and of the tathagatas.
(135) Though that is said, Buddhahood is not newly created.
(136) As it was before, it is the same after.
(137) It is the changeless buddha nature.
(138) The change is becoming free of the stains.

How is there change in the true nature, the essence, that these qualities of maturation are as if they were newly obtained? In line 129, "At that time" means at the time when one has become free of the concepts of elimination, of remedy, of the true nature, and of the result. When one is free from these concepts, one has the realization of the true nature, which is like the empty aspect of space or the clarity aspect of the dharmakaya. When one has realized the true nature, there is the manifestation of the qualities of the rupakayas, which is

like the appearance of blossoming flowers. In this way there is the appearance of these qualities to the one who has the realization of the dharmakaya.

The text says that at the time of the result, in the body of space, the body that is like the sky, there blossom the flowers that are the physical signs of Buddhahood. This means that when the true nature has been realized, when buddha nature has manifested and there is freedom from all conceptualization, then in the body that is like space there will appear the flowers, which is a poetic way to say that the thirty-two major and the eighty secondary signs will appear on the body.

Ultimately, the buddha nature has always been pure and has never been stained. Primordially, the incidental stains have no reality of their own. Although ultimately it is pure, in terms of relative appearances buddha nature goes through three phases in relation to the obscuration of the defilements, obscuration to knowledge, and obscuration to meditation. In the first phase there are impurities of the obscuration of the defilements, the obscuration to knowledge, and the obscuration to meditation. In the second phase the buddha nature has been purified of the obscuration of defilements, but the impurity of the obscurations to knowledge and meditation still remains. Later when the buddha nature is pure of the obscuration of defilements and of the obscuration to knowledge but still has the impurity of the obscuration to meditation, it is both pure and impure. In the third phase of complete purity, all three obscurations have been removed. Although it undergoes change, ultimately speaking the buddha nature has always been pure, in terms of relative appearances of these three phases of impurity, of both purity and impurity, and of purity.

These three phases are given specific names. The phase of impurity, having the obscurations of defilements, knowledge, and meditation, is called the stage of ordinary beings. The mixed phase, which is pure of the obscuration of the defilements but still has the impurity of knowledge and meditation, is called the stage of a bodhisattva. The second part of this stage of a bodhisattva is pure of two of the

obscurations (of defilements and knowledge), but still has the impurity of the obscuration to meditation. The bodhisattva is a hero or courageous being who is following this path, in which he or she has undergone some purification but still needs some obscurations removed. The final phase of complete purity is the stage of the tathagata, the perfect Buddha; this is the state of complete Buddhahood, when all three obscurations have been eliminated.

Although there are these three phases of beings, bodhisattvas, and tathagatas, that does not mean that the state of Buddhahood is something newly created. This is because the buddha nature, or buddha essence, is said to be exactly the same for all three phases. When tathagatas were ordinary beings, they had buddha nature and afterward, at the achievement of Buddhahood, the buddha nature was still exactly the same. So when beings become bodhisattvas, there is nothing new being created, and when the bodhisattvas become buddhas, again there is nothing new being created. It's not that one previously didn't have buddha nature and then at the attainment of Buddhahood one developed it. And it isn't that there was something there before that was then eliminated. The buddha nature itself does not undergo any change throughout all three phases, and that is why the buddha nature, or buddha essence, is said to be changeless; throughout all time it does not undergo any change. Nothing new is created.

Although it is said that the buddha nature is changeless, here we have talked about a nature that is changeless and have also just talked about a change, a transformation. What is it that is changeless and what is it that changes? What is changeless is the buddha nature; it remains exactly the same throughout the three phases. The change that occurs is in terms of the incidental obscurations; it is a change in terms of becoming free of these stains. In ordinary beings the stains have not been purified. These obscurations have been partly purified at the phase of bodhisattvas. The incidental stains have been completely removed at the stage of Buddhahood. This change occurs in terms of becoming free of the incidental stains; it is not due to a change in the buddha nature. The text presents the view of the presence of the buddha nature, which is changeless, and the qualities within it, which are always present and manifest later.

Question: Why is it that ordinary beings cannot benefit from the sambhogakaya?

Rinpoche: There are two kinds of beings who have to be taught the Buddhadharma: those who are pure and those who are impure. The sambhogakaya is a manifestation to those who are pure, that is, the bodhisattvas. While we remain as ordinary, impure beings, we cannot receive the benefit of the sambhogakaya manifestation because we cannot encounter it immediately. But when we go from the impure state to the pure state, at that time we will receive the benefit of the sambhogakaya. If we remain as an ordinary, impure being, then we can't get the benefit, so we have to advance, to develop to reach the pure state.

Q: When we are doing a sadhana, such as White Tara, are we somehow getting in touch with the sambhogakaya?

R: When we are practicing, we are directing our prayers and supplications to the dharmakaya Buddha. When the dharmakaya Buddha takes on a form, that is the sambhogakaya, and then we make supplications to that form. So deity practice is practicing through making supplications to the sambhogakaya form. By doing these practices, we receive the blessings of the sambhogakaya. But in terms of the activity, the activity that benefits us is through the supreme nirmanakaya who is the Buddha.

The activity that we receive during the practice is a blessing and a clear appearance or vivid image. We also receive the common siddhis of long life, health, and wealth, and so on, and the supreme siddhi of good samadhi meditation develops and becomes clearer and more stable.

Q: If one experiences a collapse of the three times, would one receive the teaching as a pure teaching and be no different from the teacher and the taught? Does it mean that in that timeless time, one would be receiving the teachings from the teacher and one would be the same as the teachings and the taught at that time?

R: In terms of this inseparability, at the time of attainment of the dharmakaya, one sees the true nature of phenomena; there is the wis-

dom that sees things exactly as they are. There is also the wisdom that sees all the variety of things, seeing all beings and and also seeing that they are in the state of delusion. This causes love for all beings, and due to that love and knowledge, there arise the form kayas to help those beings and to teach them. So to say that the teacher, the pupils, and the teaching are inseparable is not correct.

In terms of the time, it's timeless time or sometimes called fourth time. If we don't examine or analyze it, we think of past, present, and future. But in actual fact, time is just a fabrication of the mind. We say today is Sunday, or today is Tuesday. But if you ask, "What do you mean by Sunday?" there isn't any such thing as a Sunday or a Tuesday. There isn't time in this way.

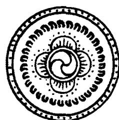
If one realizes the true nature of phenomena exactly as it is, that means that one has reached the first bodhisattva level. With that realization, one will encounter the five definite qualities of the sambhogakaya: the teacher, the teaching, and so on. So one will be able to receive this through following the realization of the true nature of things exactly as it is. But one doesn't particularly do that through time, and there isn't really any definite kind of connection between time and realization. When one has realized timelessness, that means that one has realized the true nature of all phenomena, and then one will encounter these five qualities. But it is not particularly connected with the collapsing of the three times.

Q: Could you give an example of clinging to meditation? Is this the same as or different from being aware during the meditation, such as being aware of one's breathing all the time?

R: The beginning meditator may have a great interest and desire to meditate, but this is neither clinging nor a negative attachment to meditation. The inappropriate clinging to meditation comes much later when all the obstacles have been removed. At this high level the last thing to be removed is this attachment to meditation, so it is not relevant at the present level of our meditation. As for focusing the mind on the breathing, this is very good because it is a remedy for having too many thoughts. When there are a great number of thoughts, the remedy is to focus the mind on the breathing.

In Tibetan, the equivalent for the word "alertness" has more of a meaning of being rather externally oriented. Being alert means "I'm not going to develop mind poisons; I'm not going to let my mind become distracted," and so on, and that is slightly more externally oriented. In actually resting in meditation, you have mindfulness or memory, which is just not forgetting, and awareness, so that you are just aware of what is occurring in the mind. One could say "resting in alertness."

6
THE REFUTATION OF OTHERS' VIEWS



OF THE FIVE major parts of the explanation of this treatise, we have just finished looking at the third part, which was all about buddha nature. Now we come to the fourth part, answering the objections of others. The process of refutation, proving that another view is wrong, is a process of finding fault with others. In the treatises on the Buddha's teachings, the meaning is so vast and so profound that it is possible that some texts will have errors in them. Sometimes these may be small mistakes and sometimes big mistakes. If there is an error in a text, it must be directly explained and refuted, otherwise it will be perpetuated. Therefore scholars refute mistakes that occur in texts in order to allow pupils to recognize the mistakes as such, and in that way a mistaken view will not be perpetuated.

The great masters of the past took the responsibility for preserving and maintaining the Buddha's teachings in a very pure and faultless state. To do that, they considered it necessary to write texts giving an explanation of the meaning without any fault or error. If there were any errors in any text, it was necessary to refute them and to do so without any malice or envy. If one found a fault within oneself, that fault had to be eliminated, and if one found a fault in someone else, then that fault had to be eliminated. Because of the necessity to

eliminate errors, the practice of the refutation of others' views arose. In this text, there is a seven-part section refuting others' views.

D. The refutation of the objections of others

1. The brief description of these objections

(139) If someone has the negative view
(140) That the buddha-qualities have no cause,
(141) Or conceives them as not being oneself
(142) But created by external causes and conditions,
(143) What difference is there from non-Buddhist eternalism and nihilism?

These lines refer to the fact that some people do not believe in buddha nature and say that there is no cause for the Buddha's qualities. The first incorrect view to be refuted is the view that the qualities of the Buddha have no cause. The Buddha appeared in the world with the thirty-two qualities of the dharmakaya in his mind and the thirty-two qualities of the rupakayas in his body. No one disagrees with that; one can't say that the Buddha came to this world and didn't have these qualities. Everyone agrees that the Buddha came and that the Buddha was without fault and possessed these special qualities. But there are people who say that these qualities are without cause, meaning that the nature of phenomena is emptiness, that there are impure phenomena and their nature is emptiness, that they have no reality. That itself is a good view. But these people say that there is no basis for the arising of pure appearances. They accept that the Buddha appeared in this world, and they accept that he had these qualities, but they say that there is no basis from which these qualities have arisen, because the nature of everything is emptiness. In holding this view, they do not deny that there are any causes. They accept that there are causes for things, but what they are saying is that, in terms of the Buddha's qualities, since the nature of phenomena is emptiness, there's nowhere that the qualities can arise from. There's just this emptiness, and so in that sense there is no cause, no

presence of a buddha nature from which these qualities arise. Their view, you could say, is like a belief that denies a cause.

There is another view: that the cause from which these qualities come is external. If we take the example of a flower, the flower comes from a seed, so the flower's own seed is that from which it arises; it has its own cause. There are those who hold the view that the Buddha's qualities do not come from an internal cause but from external causes and conditions. Instead of the cause for the arising of his qualities being within the Buddha, the arising of these qualities depends upon external relative appearances, delusory appearances. In other words, learning, contemplating, and meditating and gathering the accumulations act as the causes and conditions from which the qualities of the Buddha arise. Gathering the accumulations and so on are the necessary conditions for the arising of Buddhahood, but there is no actual cause for Buddhahood and its qualities among these things. These two views are given here: one, there is no actual cause from which the qualities of Buddhahood originate, and the other, that these qualities originate not from an internal cause but from external causes and conditions. Rangjung Dorje says that these views are no different from the views of the tirthikas, the views of the non-Buddhists who are eternalists or nihilists.

Among the tirthikas, the nihilists' school of the Charvakas says that there is no cause or result. As an example, they say that the arising of phenomena is like mushrooms, which just appear out of the ground without any cause. They also believe that there is no result; it's like a wind blowing away a pile of ash. You have a little heap of ash, the wind comes and blows it away, and it's gone; there's nothing left. In the same way there is no result. Things are there due to their own nature; they just are what they are without needing to depend on any cause or result. They give the example of a pea: a pea is round. You may say, "Who made it round? Who came and rolled the pea into a round shape?" Nobody; peas are just naturally round by themselves, and they don't need any cause to make them round. Also thorns are sharp and pointed. Who sharpened the thorns and made them pointed? Nobody; they're just naturally pointed and sharp.

Things are just naturally what they are without needing any cause when there's no result. So Rangjung Dorje says that those who claim that the Buddha's qualities do not depend on a cause hold the same kind of view as the Charvakas, a nihilistic view.

The view that the qualities depend on external causes and conditions is like the views of the eternalists, who believe that there is a great deity or creator like Shiva who then grants or bestows his siddhi. If one thinks that Buddhahood is due to external causes and conditions, one is holding the same kind of view as these eternalist tirthikas. One should not hold that kind of view. Instead one should have the special Buddhist view of the presence of the buddha nature, the buddha essence. In that way, one accepts that there is a cause for Buddhahood and that this causal condition is the presence of the buddha nature.

2. *The relationship of purity and impurity*

(144) Mental events [of the buddhas] appear to arise and cease momentarily
(145) Corresponding to impure mental events [of beings].
(146) If they [the mental events of the buddhas] were not to be like that,
(147) The activity of the form kayas would discontinue.
(148) However, they are not called "mental events"
(149) But "discriminating wisdom."

What is the difference between purity and impurity? "Purity" refers to the presence of the five dhyana wisdoms, such as the discriminating wisdom, the wisdom of accomplishing actions, and the wisdom of equality. Rangjung Dorje deals first with discriminating wisdom. The nature of the discriminating wisdom is that it is able to see all of the variety of beings. It sees all of these distinctly; all these details do not just merge together, but all the different kinds of beings are seen along with all their delusions. This discriminating wisdom sees how some beings have suffering, some have happiness, and so on. All of these are seen distinctly. Also, it's not the case that

sometimes some of these are seen and sometimes others are not seen; all are seen simultaneously.

As described before, buddha nature has power, wisdom, and love for beings. With discriminating wisdom, it is aware of all the different particularities of beings. It is aware of the different kinds of beings, those who are pure, those who are impure, and so on, and the wisdom knows what is necessary to help each kind of being. So the Buddha recognizes various kinds of beings and understands what needs to be done to help them. Therefore, the Buddha appears to act and to have thoughts and activities that begin and end. This is because, in relation to all beings, there is a change in that wisdom. In seeing what is necessary for particular beings, the Buddha has new words and activities that correspond to the mental events and activities occurring in the impure state of ordinary beings. There is the appearance of beginning and ending in the wisdom of the Buddha.

The wisdom of the Buddha has apparent arising and cessation. If there were no apparent arising and cessation in the Buddha's wisdom, his wisdom would not be able to engage with the arising and cessation of the minds of ordinary beings. Because there is the sambhogakaya and nirmanakaya to benefit beings, there must be this apparent arising and cessation in the Buddha's wisdom. However, this apparent arising and cessation is not the same as the mental activity of ordinary beings, and that term is not used for the Buddha's wisdom. This understanding by the Buddha of all the various particularities of beings in the impure state is called discriminating wisdom instead of mental activity.

With the attainment of Buddhahood there is also activity. The activity of Buddhahood is momentary; things begin and end with each moment of this activity. The qualities of the dharmakaya also have an aspect of arising and cessation. There are also the qualities and activities of the rupakayas, which appear to be similar to the impure activities of beings with impure appearances; there is a continuous arising and cessation with each instant. In the same way, in terms of the activity of the Buddha, there is arising and cessation occurring with every instant.

There are three different kinds of nirmanakayas: the supreme nirmanakaya, the created nirmanakayas, and the born nirmanakayas. All these different kinds of nirmanakayas perform activities that are in harmony with the needs of various beings. If Buddhahood instead were a state of unchanging permanence without appearances, there would be no nirmanakaya activity; nirmanakaya activity can occur only if there is the arising and ceasing of appearances.

The term used for this continuous activity in ordinary beings is samskara, but the term used for the Buddha's activity is karma. Generally, samskara is accompanied by a belief in things as being real along with attachment to illusory appearances. The wisdom of the Buddha is not mixed with these illusory appearances. Instead, his wisdom sees all these phenomena as they are, without any attachment or involvement. Therefore instead of saying that the buddhas have samskara, the text says they have activity that comes from discriminating wisdom—in other words, wisdom activity. Through our five ordinary senses, we have the perception of the primary elements and all phenomena, which are composed of those elements. Anything whatsoever, the nature of which is these four elements, is perceived by the senses and is also perceived by the wisdom of the Buddha. The difference is that for ordinary people, these perceptions are accompanied by grasping and attachment to things because they have the belief that things are real, and therefore they live in a state of delusion. But if there is no grasping, no belief in the reality of these phenomena, wisdom arises. Then the power of the essence of phenomena manifests.

3. *The wisdom of accomplishing actions*

(150) Whatever has the nature of the great elements and so on
(151) And their perceiver manifest their powerful essence.
(152) Between delusion and nondelusion
(153) There is not the slightest difference in appearances.

From the discriminating wisdom arises the wisdom of accomplishing actions. Ordinary beings have the five sensory appearances, the five main material elements which result from the sensory organs

and the sensory objects. In the Buddha, all the innate power of the five senses manifests so that they operate as the wisdom of accomplishing activities.

The Buddha's seeing has a special power, but what is seen by him is exactly the same as what is seen by ordinary beings. All these appearances of earth, water, houses, mountains, and so on are exactly the same for ordinary beings. But the difference lies in the way in which the Buddha sees. For example, a magician can create various illusions such as an elephant, horse, or woman. However, what the magician sees is exactly the same as what the person for whom he is creating the illusions sees. In the same way, the Buddha and ordinary beings see the same phenomena, but the Buddha knows they are created.

(154) The difference is the presence or absence of dualism.
(155) If that were not like that,
(156) How could the buddha-activity be applied?

What is the difference between what is seen by the Buddha in his pure wisdom and what is seen by impure beings in their state of delusion? The difference is in terms of clinging to dualism. There is a perceiver and there is the appearance of external perceptions. If these are conceived of as two separate things, the person remains in a state of delusion. The Buddha does not have the delusion of clinging to dualism. If the Buddha could not see the same outer appearances as ordinary beings do, the Buddha would not be able to engage in helping other beings because he would not develop compassion for other beings and he would not be able to effectively engage in the right activity to benefit beings. These outer appearances, however, are seen by the Buddha without being in a state of delusion. Otherwise, if the Buddha and ordinary beings treated appearances the same, the Buddha would not be able to lead ordinary persons out of a state of delusion. The Buddha sees these same appearances without a state of delusion, so he is able to benefit beings.

4. The activity of all-accomplishing wisdom

Next is a description of the activity of the all-accomplishing wisdom, which is divided into five sections.

(A) IT ARISES WITHOUT THOUGHT

(157) The examples of the wish-fulfilling jewel and so on
(158) Are taught so as to demonstrate nonconceptual power.

These lines give examples of the difference between the way in which appearances arise for buddhas and for sentient beings. In respect to this, there is a difficulty in the view of the Rangtong school of the Middle Way because their view emphasizes that the nature of all phenomena is emptiness and does not present the luminosity aspect. From the Rangtong view, when Buddhahood is attained, appearances just disappear because they are conventional or relative appearances. Taking the Rangtong viewpoint, which does not teach the aspect of luminosity and the manifestation of appearances, the power and the qualities of Buddhahood would not be evident. So in this Rangtong view, there is the presentation of how appearances just disappear at Buddhahood.

But *A Treatise on Buddha Nature* says that appearances do not disappear at Buddhahood, but instead that buddhas are able to see all beings. However, even though they see all beings, this does not mean that they are experiencing delusion. The difference is that ordinary beings have a belief in duality when they perceive appearances, and in Buddhahood that duality is absent. To illustrate this difference, the text gives the example of the wish-fulfilling jewel. The *Uttaratantra* uses the examples of the wish-fulfilling jewel and the wish-fulfilling tree that fulfill the hopes of all beings. A wish-fulfilling jewel doesn't have any thought and doesn't make any effort, yet it fulfills people's wishes and hopes. In the same way that the wish-fulfilling jewel or tree has no thoughts or deliberate effort, at Buddhahood there isn't the thought "I must do this; I must help such and such a person." There's no thought and no effort; there's just spontaneous activity helping beings. Therefore the Rangtong school concludes that at the attainment of Buddhahood, everything disappears into emptiness, so that there are no qualities, and so on. But it isn't like that. On the path, there has been the gathering of the accumulations, and as a result of the accumulations there are these results. But it's not that these accumulations have created this result. Rather, due to one's

having gathered the accumulations, at Buddhahood there is the manifestation of these powers and abilities.

(B) *It arises without effort*

(159) However, this is not solely in the beings of others.
(160) If it were, the beings of others would be wisdom.
(161) If one believes that, then wisdom would be delusion.

The examples of the wish-fulfilling jewel, the wish-fulfilling tree, and the spontaneously resounding drum of the deities may be understood in two different ways.[17] One way of understanding it is that there isn't really any buddha activity: due to the Buddha's having accumulated merit, beings are able to perceive this activity, but in terms of the Buddha himself, the Buddha is not really there. There is just this activity, which is experienced by others due to their own accumulation of merit. That is one way one could understand these examples, but that is not the correct way. The other way is that wisdom or luminosity and the buddha-qualities are present but that the Buddha has no concepts, no intention of benefiting, no thought "I am going to benefit beings." Without those concepts, the Buddha's power to benefit beings is spontaneously manifested, the Buddha's body is spontaneously manifested, and the Buddha's speech to teach the Dharma is spontaneously manifested. It's not that there is an activity perceived and there is no wisdom or power behind it, but this nonconceptual power of the Buddha is manifested. This is the meaning of the examples of the activity of the wish-fulfilling jewel, the wish-fulfilling tree, and the drum of the deities.

That is the explanation of the nature of the Buddha's qualities and activity. The wrong explanation would be that the Buddha is like a god so the Buddha's qualities have no cause and are just present. The other wrong view is that these qualities of the Buddha just manifest to beings or arise within other beings, whereas the Buddha himself has gone into emptiness so that there is no real buddha-activity. This is an incorrect view because the Buddha has the five wisdoms, the ten powers, the four fearlessnesses, the eighteen distinct qualities, and so on. If these qualities were to appear only to other beings in-

dependently of the Buddha, if they existed only in ordinary beings, then they would not be qualities of the Buddha. So the five wisdoms, the ten powers, the four fearlessnesses, and so on would belong to other beings. In the case of the five wisdoms of the Buddha, which are wisdoms free of delusion, if these wisdoms did not belong to the Buddha but instead were wisdoms belonging to ordinary beings, these wisdoms would be delusions because delusion is what ordinary beings experience. Instead, the qualities of power, wisdom, and love are qualities belonging to the Buddha; they do appear to other beings but do not just arise independently within other beings.

(c) It arises without attachment

(162) If one believes that self-appearances are attachment,
(163) Then the appearances within a mirror
(164) Would have thoughts of attachment.

One might argue that if the Buddha can perceive appearances, then he could be attached to them. One can refute this with the example of a mirror. A mirror does not have attachment to the images that appear in it. Some would say that if the Buddha has his own wisdom, this wisdom does not belong to the other beings but is the Buddha's own wisdom. But if the Buddha perceives appearances, then there is bound to be a belief, a recognition, that these are appearances, and therefore that belief would become an attachment. In other words, to say that the Buddha perceives appearances means that the Buddha would have an attachment to appearances. But this is not so. Merely perceiving appearances does not necessarily mean that there is a belief in duality. If that were so—if just the arising of appearances meant that there was attachment—then a mirror would have attachment and would develop concepts and thoughts. But a mirror doesn't have any thoughts. In the same way, for the Buddha, appearances arise, but there are no thoughts of attachment to those appearances.

(d) It is not stained by delusion

(165) All the delusions beings have
(166) Appear as the object of [a buddha's] wisdom.

(167) But wisdom is unstained by delusion.
(168) For example, though the great elements
(169) Appear to originate and cease within space,
(170) Space is unstained; it is without origin or cessation.

The Buddha has wisdom and perceives appearances without becoming attached or developing a belief in dualism. How does the Buddha perceive appearances? It is said that the object of the Buddha's wisdom is all the delusions that beings have. He sees all the delusions of all the beings in the six realms of samsara; he can see the illusory appearances that beings perceive and the sufferings they experience. He can see what beings perceive who do not have so many illusory appearances or who do not have suffering of the mind or suffering of the body. The Buddha can perceive what each one of these beings is experiencing, from ordinary beings up to the bodhisattvas on the tenth bodhisattva level. But in seeing these appearances, does the wisdom of the Buddha become delusion? No, it doesn't. Even though he perceives all the delusions experienced by beings in samsara, the Buddha's wisdom itself does not become stained by this delusion. An example of how this is comes from the *Uttaratantra*. Within space there appear the elements. The mandala of earth, the mandala of water, and the mandala of air all abide and cease in space. The earth arises, abides, and ceases; the water arises, abides, and ceases; and the air arises, abides, and ceases. All this occurs within space, but space itself has does not arise, abide, or cease; it is unaffected by the arising, abiding, and ceasing of the mandalas of earth, air, and water. In the same way, the Buddha's wisdom is unaffected by the delusions that it perceives.

The Buddha has the wisdom that knows the variety of phenomena and sees all appearances without any delusion. The Buddha also sees the delusions that beings have. If the Buddha sees the delusions of beings, does that not mean that the Buddha himself will have delusions? The Buddha does see all the delusions that beings have, but this does not result in the Buddha himself having delusions. He knows the delusions that other beings have without being affected by

any delusion himself. This can be compared to the example of space. The elements of earth, air, fire, and water appear to arise and cease within space, but space itself is unaffected. In the same way, the wisdom of the Buddha knows and sees all the delusions of beings, but it is unaffected by these delusions.

(E) *Its meaning*

(171) Though the wisdom of the Buddha engages
(172) With beings, in that same way, it is not stained.
(173) This is not named "delusion";
(174) It is called "[the wisdom of] the accomplishment of action."

The wisdom of the Victorious One engages with all beings so that it perceives all beings and yet is itself unstained by delusion. It sees the conditions of all beings from the hot and cold hell realms up to the highest god realms of samsara, and it sees all their illusory experiences. It also sees all the beliefs of the tirthikas and shravakas and pratyekabuddhas, but this wisdom is unstained, unaffected by those beliefs. As in the example of space being unaffected by the arising, abiding, and ceasing of the mandalas of earth, water, and air within it, so in the same way, the Buddha's wisdom is not stained by knowing the sufferings of the hot and cold hells, the sufferings of hunger and thirst among the hungry ghosts, and so on. The Buddha is not affected by the tirthikas' belief in an atman or the shravakas' and pratyekabuddhas' belief in the reality of the atoms or the beliefs of the Chittamatrins regarding the reality of the alaya, and so on. Therefore this wisdom of the Buddha is not called a delusion, but all-accomplishing wisdom.

This wisdom that accomplishes actions means that the Buddha has the wisdom that sees the actual nature of things and the various conditions of beings, and, knowing this, the Buddha is able to engage in activity that benefits beings. If the Buddha had no perception of the illusory appearances or the suffering that beings experience, he would not be able to engage in activity to benefit them. But with the wisdom that knows the illusions and sufferings of beings, the Buddha is able to

act and help beings. That is why this wisdom is called all-accomplishing wisdom.

5. *The wisdom of equality*

(175) The mind that has been purified of the three obscurations
(176) Is "[the wisdom of] equality" and "peace."
(177) Because it has love and great compassion,
(178) The sambhoga and so on appears to them.
(179) This is stated in order to refute those who state
(180) That when Buddhahood is attained it is the same as the Hinayana.

The fifth section concerns how the buddhas engage in their activity. The wisdom of the buddhas understands the delusions that beings have, and this wisdom itself is unaffected. The wisdom of the Buddha has no arising, no cessation, and no delusion. Because this wisdom sees delusion but is itself undeluded, the wisdom of the Buddha is not delusory but rather is the wisdom of the accomplishment of activity.

The text says, "The mind that has been purified of the three obscurations." The three obscurations are the obscuration of the defilements, the obscuration to knowledge, and the obscuration to meditation. Although beings possess buddha nature, it is these three obscurations that obscure buddha nature, and so we need to remove them. When these three obscurations are present in the mind, we possess the defiled mind, or the seventh consciousness. When these three obscurations have been removed, the seventh consciousness is transformed into the wisdom of equality.

This mind that has the defilements and is transformed into the wisdom of equality is described in the *Abhidharmasamucchaya* (*The Compendium of the Abhidharma*) written by Asanga. There are two kinds of Abhidharma: the Mahayana Abhidharma and the Hinayana Abhidharma. The Mahayana Abhidharma is summarized in Asanga's great treatise *Abhidharmasamucchaya*, while the Hinayana Abhidharma is summarized in the *Abhidharmakosha* (*The Treasury of the*

Abhidharma) by Asanga's brother Vasubandhu. Vasubandhu, in his summary of the Hinayana Abhidharma, the *Abhidharmakosha*, presents only six consciousnesses, whereas in the *Abhidharma-samucchaya* of Asanga, eight consciousnesses are taught. Among these eight consciousnesses, the seventh consciousness, or defiled consciousness, maintains four different functions: a belief in a self, an attachment to a self, ignorance in relation to the self, and pride in relation to the self. This work also lists fifty-one types of mental events that occur in the mind and classifies these into various kinds. One classification is a list of five mental events that are always present in the mind. These five mental events, which don't come or go as most thoughts do, are sensation; perception (or conception); mental orientation, in which the mind orients or directs itself; contact; and a degree of clarity. These five basic, continually present mental events together with the four aspects of belief in a self constitute the nine factors that are functions of the seventh, or the defiled, consciousness. We can also classify states of mind into two types: enduring mentality and unstable mentality. The first six consciousnesses are not stable or continuous states of mind because they arise and cease and undergo change. But the seventh consciousness is enduring, so it is continuously present from when a person is an ordinary being right through when he or she has progressed up to the eighth bodhisattva level. So the seventh consciousness is an enduring state of mind.

This seventh consciousness is basically a belief in a self. There are actually two kinds of a belief in a self. First, when we have the thought "There is me," this is a function of the sixth consciousness, the mental consciousness, not the seventh consciousness, because this thought has a degree of clarity and awareness. The second kind of a belief in a self is always there whether we are sleeping or talking or eating; even if we forget all about the idea of self or me, it is there continuously. And continuously present belief in a self is an aspect of the seventh consciousness, which always makes this distinction between self and others. However, when we achieve realization, we realize that self and others are not different, and this becomes the wisdom of sameness, or equality of self and others. So the afflicted consciousness is transformed at Buddhahood into the wisdom of equality.

It is said that the nature of the wisdom of equality is peace. This is because when we have become free of the concepts of self and other, good and bad, pleasant and unpleasant, and so on, we have eliminated the foundation of the defilements. Being free of these concepts of opposites which create the defilements is a state of peace. In *Entering the Middle Way*, Chandrakirti says that upon having attained the eighth bodhisattva level, one becomes free of the defilements, free of the stains. This means that the three highest bodhisattva levels (the eighth, ninth, and tenth) become the pure bodhisattva levels.

Being free of the defilements, we have attained a state of peace, which is a quality of the wisdom of equality. This state is not only one of peace; it also possesses love and compassion. In the realization of the wisdom of equality, which comes from transforming the afflicted consciousness, we realize ultimate truth, which is of great benefit to ourselves. But there are other beings in a state of delusion within samsara who have not realized this wisdom. On the level of ultimate truth, they are dwelling in this nature of equality, but, not having realized the ultimate, they have this delusion of duality. Having the delusion of duality, they experience the defilements and the sufferings of samsara and therefore cannot attain a state of true peace. At the attainment of Buddhahood they have the realization of the ultimate nature of sameness, and this causes love and compassion to arise toward those beings who have not realized the nature of sameness. We have this love and compassion without an object which wishes them to have happiness and to be free of suffering. We have realized the true nature and the wisdom of equality has been attained, yet we also develop this love and compassion for beings who have not yet gained this realization and dwell in a state of delusion. Therefore we say that this love and compassion that we develop at realization is without an object.

Because of this love and compassion without an object, the two form kayas (the nirmanakaya and sambhogakaya) arise. How does that occur? From the dharmakaya and the realization of the wisdom of equality and from having developed this love and compassion without a reference point, these two form kayas arise to help beings.

There are four kinds of activities of the form kayas: to free those who have not been freed, to liberate those who have not been liberated, to bring reassurance and relief to those who do not have reassurance and relief, and to guide to nirvana those who have not attained nirvana. First, to free those who have not crossed over the ocean of samsara means that through the Buddha's activity he is able to free beings who are suffering because of their defilements. Second, to liberate those who have not been liberated means that, even though beings may be free from suffering, the defilements are still present within them, and so through the Buddha's activity, beings can become liberated from these defilements. Third, to reassure those who have not been reassured is to show them that a great result can be obtained. For example, the Buddha is able to create the sambhogakaya for bodhisattvas on the lower bodhisattva levels. In the first two kinds of activities the nirmanakaya is created, but for the third activity, the sambhogakaya is created, which appears to bodhisattvas on the lower bodhisattva levels to show that the great result can be obtained. Fourth, for those on the highest bodhisattva levels, the Buddha is able to bring them to nirvana or a state of Buddhahood. These are the four activities achieved by the nirmanakaya and by the sambhogakaya.

The activities of the nirmanakaya are freeing those who have not been freed and liberating those who have not been liberated; the activities of the sambhogakaya are giving reassurance to those who have not been reassured and leading to nirvana those who have not achieved nirvana. The reason for the arising of the form kayas is that the attainment of enlightenment without this aspect of clarity would mean that Buddhahood would be just a state of emptiness and beings would attain only the Hinayana attainment. To refute that understanding of Buddhahood, the discriminating wisdom, the wisdom of accomplishment, and the wisdom of equality are taught. So Buddhahood isn't just a realization of emptiness and resting in that, but rather, from the wisdom of equality there arise the two form kayas with the activity to help beings.

What does Rangjung Dorje mean when he says in lines 179 and 180 that the attainment of Buddhahood is not the same as the Hinayana

attainment? In the Hinayana path, the object of meditation is the selflessness of the individual, and when this is realized, the meditator becomes free from the defilements and therefore attains the state of an arhat. The Hinayana meditators, however, do not have the confidence or courage to think, "I am going to work to help all sentient beings for as long as samsara continues." Instead they think, "I must become free from samsara as quickly as possible." There are two kinds of arhats, as described in the *Abhidharmakosha* of Vasubandhu. There is the arhat with a remainder and the arhat without a remainder. The arhat with a remainder is one who is still in this world in this body but has a very strong revulsion to samsara; he sees samsara as something bad and full of suffering, so he has a total rejection of samsara. The arhat without a reminder is freed from the body; his mind enters into a very subtle state of peace free from any movement of thoughts, which is described in Gampopa's *Jewel Ornament of Liberation* as lasting for ten thousand aeons. So those Middle Way scholars who have the view that Buddhahood is attained purely through meditation on emptiness are said to have a view that is the same as the Hinayana view; therefore that view is not correct.

6. *The three kayas*

(A) The permanence of the three kayas

(181) Wisdom is the three permanences:
(182) Permanence of nature is the dharmakaya.
(183) Permanence of continuity is the sambhogakaya.
(184) Uninterruptedness is the nirmanakaya.

In the description of the permanence of the three kayas, the text says that the ultimate wisdom of the buddhas is changeless. The three kayas have this ultimate wisdom, so the dharmakaya, sambhogakaya, and supreme nirmanakaya all have the qualities of permanence.

First there is the permanence of the dharmakaya. Buddha nature, or buddha essence, is changeless and remains so from the time one is an ordinary being until one has attained the dharmakaya. After one has attained the dharmakaya, it remains for as long as samsara is not

empty. The nature of the dharmakaya is the wisdom that is changeless. So the dharmakaya has a natural permanence by its nature.

Because the Buddha taught that everything is impermanent, one could ask, "Isn't the dharmakaya being permanent in contradiction to the Buddha's teachings?" But this statement of the Buddha applies only to all composite objects, which are impermanent. The nature of the dharmakaya is the dharmadhatu, so it transcends all conceptualization and is beyond the four extremes of existence: existing, not existing, both existing and not existing, and neither existing nor not existing. Therefore the dharmakaya is said to be permanent due to its essence or nature.

The sambhogakaya and nirmanakaya do not have that permanence due to their very nature. We could object to the permanence of the sambhogakaya. Does that mean then that the sambhogakaya and nirmanakaya are impermanent and without any essence? No, the sambhogakaya and nirmanakaya also have qualities of permanence, but their permanence is not this changeless nature but the permanence of continuity. The sambhogakaya manifests in its own realm, and within that, there is the impermanence of one instant following after another. In this way, there is the impermanence of momentary passage of time in the sambhogakaya. But the sambhogakaya will not pass away and will not become empty. Therefore it always remains and therefore has the quality of the permanence of continuity.

The sambhogakaya has five definite qualities called the five certainties. The first certainty is the certainty of location: the sambhogakaya teaches in a pure realm. As we have just seen, the pure realm appears to have qualities of impermanence, but in essence it has the nature of permanence. Therefore the sambhogakaya Buddha teaches within a pure realm. The second certainty is the certainty of the pupils: all are bodhisattvas on the highest levels of the bodhisattva path because only high bodhisattvas can visit the sambhogakaya. The third certainty is the certainty of the teaching: in the sambhogakaya there are no provisional teachings but always definitive teachings. The fourth certainty is the certainty of the teacher: a unique sambhogakaya manifestation. The fifth certainty is the certainty of time: the wheel of the Dharma is continuously turning

throughout all times. This, of course, is unlike our worldly teachings, which begin when the teacher shows up and end when the teacher leaves.

We could also object to the permanence of the nirmanakaya. The nirmanakaya does not have the permanence of nature of the dharmakaya, and it doesn't have the permanence of continuity of the sambhogakaya. The supreme nirmanakaya Buddha is Shakyamuni Buddha, who was born as the son of King Shuddhodana, grew up, abandoned the kingdom, manifested the attainment of enlightenment, and passed away at Kushinagara. Obviously for this supreme nirmanakaya there were apparent qualities of impermanence. But the nirmanakaya activity never ceases, so there is an uninterrupted continuity of the nirmanakaya. Even though the Buddha is not alive now, there are the thousand buddhas of this aeon, so there are successive appearances of the nirmanakayas, and this activity will continue for as long as there is samsara.

Even though a supreme nirmanakaya Buddha is not actually present, there are the created nirmanakaya, the born nirmanakaya, and the variegated nirmanakaya emanations. The created nirmanakaya emanation is a being who just appears spontaneously, such as Padmasambhava, who appeared on a lotus flower. The born nirmanakayas take the form of a human being such as the Buddha. The variegated nirmanakayas manifest in the form of animals as described in the jataka stories. So the nirmanakaya is said to have the quality of permanence of continuity of activity because the activities of the nirmanakaya are occurring continuously.

Although this activity comes from the Buddha, it does not require any great effort on his part. When the Buddha gives teachings, it is just spontaneous or effortless. Some beings receive these teachings and might think, "This will be beneficial for myself," and so they practice them for their own benefit. Others might think, "These teachings are beneficial for all beings," and so they practice them to benefit others. Some might consider how to disseminate the teachings, and so they spread and develop the teachings. And some might not regard the teachings as important and just discard them. But in any case, the teachings are given effortlessly and continuously. They

may not be present for only one generation, but continue into the next generation and the next, so the Dharma teachings, although handed down, will be the same. Thus the activity of these teachings carries on. The supreme nirmanakaya has this quality of uninterrupted spontaneous activity.

(B) *The three impermanences*

(185) There are three impermanences:
(186) Mentally fabricated emptiness is impermanent.
(187) The mind of moving thoughts is impermanent.
(188) The composite six consciousnesses are impermanent.

When the text says that mentally fabricated emptiness is impermanent, it refers not to the emptiness that is the true nature of phenomena but to an emptiness that is created by the mind. Thoughts we have may appear solid and reliable to us, but they also by their very nature are impermanent because they are delusory. Finally, the six consciousnesses are impermanent because they are composite in nature; that is, the consciousnesses are made up of many parts, and composite things are impermanent.

The description of the three impermanences follows. First, the dharmakaya has a permanence due to the fact that it is the true nature of phenomena. But if we conceive of emptiness, that idea of emptiness is just a mental fabrication and therefore impermanent. There is the emptiness of the dharmakaya, but the emptiness that we have as an idea is just a creation of the mind, so it is impermanent. Second, while the sambhogakaya has the permanence of continuity, the movement of thoughts in the mind, the arising and ceasing of thoughts, is continually changing. So the movement of thoughts is impermanent. Third, the nirmanakaya has the permanence of being an unceasing succession, but the six consciousnesses are a composite phenomenon; therefore they are impermanent.

(C) *The three impermanences are stains*

(189) However, the three permanences are present.
(190) The three impermanences are stains.
(191) The three permanences are wisdom.

The three impermanences are considered to be the stains, and the three permanences are considered to be the wisdoms. There are the three impermanences, but within these there are the three permanences. The three impermanences are the obscurations, and the three permanences are the ultimate wisdom present as a basis for purification. What we perceive are the three impermanences, but there also exist the three permanences. The three impermanences are the obscurations, which have to be eliminated. The three permanences, the wisdoms, can be made manifest. So there are the wisdoms present, and they are obscured by the three impermanent stains.

7. *Removing doubts about buddha nature*

Some people might think that what is said about buddha nature is not correct. These verses are to remove those doubts.

(a) Buddha nature is not the same as self

(192) This is not the same as the tirthikas' "self"
(193) Because of a mental designation.

First, buddha nature has been described as being pure, having the quality of luminosity, and being permanent because it is always present throughout the time of being an ordinary being until the attainment of Buddhahood. One may object by saying, "Isn't that the same as the non-Buddhist or Hindu teaching of the self, the atman, which is also said to be permanent and to have intelligence?" In fact, they are very different. They are, however, the same in terms of being permanent and having luminosity. The difference is that in the non-Buddhist view, what has been referred to as the self is in relation to the five aggregates. Sometimes the mind will be directed at the aggregate of form, so that will be identified and thought of as being the self. Or sometimes the aggregate of consciousness is conceived of as being a self. This is in fact an imputation, an idea that is being added to these skandhas by the mind, so it's a mental creation. Buddha nature is not like that. Buddha nature is not a composite; it is the actual nature of things, the dharmadhatu. Buddha nature is not a fabrication of the mind; it is the actual nature of the mind. Although

buddha nature and atman are similar in some details, in terms of their foundation they are completely different.

(B) Buddha Nature Is Not the Same as the Nirvana of the Shravakas and Pratyekabuddhas

(194) Buddha nature is not the same as the nirvana of the shravakas and pratyekabuddhas
(195) Because it manifests all the qualities of the form kayas.

We might ask, "Isn't this buddha nature the same as the nirvana of the shravakas and the pratyekabuddhas?" In fact, buddha nature, buddha essence, is not the same as the nirvana of the shravakas and pratyekabuddhas in terms of either meditation or result. Shravakas and pratyekabuddhas wish to attain peace and happiness for themselves, so they engage in extensive meditation for that purpose. When they attain this state of peace, their nirvana, they rest in it; whereas when buddha nature is meditated on and recognized, there is the attainment of Buddhahood. With the attainment of Buddhahood, there is love for all beings. From the power of this love for all beings arise the sambhogakaya and the nirmanakaya to help beings for as long as there is samsara. Therefore there is a large difference between buddha nature and the nirvana of the shravakas and pratyekabuddhas.

Also, Buddhahood is not the same as the nirvana of the shravakas and pratyekabuddhas because with the attainment of the dharmakaya there is the attainment of the wisdom of equality. From the wisdom of equality arises love and compassion for all beings without reference point. From that arise the sambhogakaya and the supreme nirmanakaya. Therefore Buddhahood is the manifestation of these two form kayas with all their qualities and signs, and this is not the case with the attainment of the shravakas and pratyekabuddhas.

The shravakas abandon the defilements, and thus they attain the state of an arhat and remain in that state for ten thousand aeons. The shravakas gain their result through meditating on the selflessness of the individual. The pratyekabuddhas reject samsara and have a strong desire to attain liberation, and they then accumulate merit for a hundred aeons. At a time when the Buddha's teachings are not present,

through their own power and ability, they gain attainment, go to a charnel ground, and meditate there on impermanence. Through realizing impermanence, they gain the realization of the selflessness of the individual and, partly, the selflessness of phenomena. The pratyekabuddhas likewise gain the state of an arhat with a remainder. In terms of then becoming an arhat without a remainder, it's more or less the same as the shravaka, the remainder being the karmic body.

So the shravakas and pratyekabuddhas have gained freedom from samsara, freedom from the obscuration of the defilements, but they don't have the same attainment as the Buddha. They don't have the attainment of the buddha-qualities, the wisdom of Buddhahood, and the manifestation of the buddha nature; they don't return in the form kayas to benefit others. Instead they rest in a state of the cessation within samadhi.

(c) Buddha nature is not the same as the bodies of humans

(196) It is not the same as the body of a being
(197) Because it is not created due to the contaminated
conditions.

Third, the question may be raised: "There is the state of Buddhahood from which the form kayas manifest. Is that not the same as the bodies of ordinary beings?" There is the reincarnation of the material body of ordinary beings and there is the form kaya. Both of these have form, but ordinary beings have a body that results in the experience of suffering. So will not the form kaya of the buddhas also experience suffering? In fact, these two bodies are completely different. The foundation of the body of an ordinary being is ignorance, and due to ignorance there arises delusion, the defilements, and the accumulation of karma. Because of karma, there is no freedom, which results in the defilements, and one gains a composite body that experiences suffering. The buddhas, however, see the true nature, the dharmakaya, and by seeing the dharmakaya they realize emptiness and develop compassion. Through the power of their compassion, the form kayas manifest to help beings. So basically their nature is completely different. Bud-

dha nature, or buddha essence, is not the same as a self; it is not the same as the nirvana of the shravakas and pratyekabuddhas; and the manifestation of the form kayas is not the same as the reincarnation of the body of ordinary beings.

When there is the manifestation of the buddha nature, there is the manifestation of the form kayas. So one might think: "Isn't this the same as the bodies of ordinary beings?" It is said that these are not the same because the bodies of ordinary beings are born due to the conditions, the contaminations, the negative factors of samsara. For ordinary beings there is ignorance; due to ignorance there is the arising of the defilements; due to defilements there is the accumulation of karma; and due to karma there is the acquisition of their bodies. So they have these bodies on the basis of ignorance. The form kayas of the Buddha—the nirmanakaya and sambhogakaya—are the result of the accumulation of merit and the accumulation of the wisdom that sees the dharmata, the wisdom that sees the true nature, so that there is no ignorance. Without ignorance, there is, from the realization of the dharmata, the arising of these forms, which are manifested to those who are to be trained. Therefore they are not the same as the bodies of ordinary beings.

We may wonder if there is a difference between the Buddha and someone who has reached Buddhahood in one lifetime, such as Milarepa. There is no difference between the mind of Milarepa and the Buddha in their realization or the attainment of Buddhahood. But in terms of their bodies, there is a difference in that the body of the Buddha is the form of the supreme nirmanakaya, the buddha nature manifested as the thirty-two major and eighty secondary signs of the body; whereas Milarepa's body arose due to the conditions of these asravas, the contaminations or negative factors of samsara, so he did not have a body with the thirty-two major and eighty secondary signs. But by practicing the special instructions, he gained realization, and in his mind he manifested the buddha nature with the thirty-two qualities of the dharmakaya. But his body was still the body that had arisen due to the negative qualities of samsara, so the body did not have the thirty-two qualities of the form kayas and the thirty-two major and eighty secondary signs. However, after

death, when Milarepa abandoned his body, which had developed due to the negative factors, the signs of the form kayas manifested as the sambhogakaya form in the bardo. In this way, Milarepa's body was a body that appeared or was created due to the conditions of the asravas, whereas the Buddha's body is not born in that way but is a spontaneous appearance of the qualities of the rupakayas from the manifestation of the buddha nature.

The text teaches how the buddha nature is not the same as the atman; it is not the same as the nirvana of the shravakas and pratyekabuddhas; and it is not the same as the bodies of ordinary beings.

(D) Buddhahood Is an Irreversible State

(198) It will not change back to the previous state
(199) Because it has manifested exactly as it is.

We may ask, "When Buddhahood is attained, is it irreversible? Might one not return to a state of delusion?" There may be a doubt about the irreversibility of this attainment. This doubt may be expressed in terms of gold. If you heat gold, it melts, but when the fire is extinguished, the gold solidifies again. So one might say that, through meditation on selflessness and meditation on dharmata, one frees oneself from the defilements and attains Buddhahood, but then afterward, when the remedy is no longer being applied, one may revert from the state of Buddhahood, just as the molten gold resolidifies. Another example is water. You can heat cold water and boil it, but when you take the pot off the fire, the water cools down again. In the same way, one could achieve Buddhahood, but then afterward it could go away. In fact, there are some (mostly non-Buddhists) who argue that one cannot attain Buddhahood. The example they give is of someone who runs and then jumps. At first he can jump three feet, and he trains in that; then he becomes more skilled at jumping and can jump five or six or seven feet. But he'll never be able to perform an endless jump no matter how much he trains. In the same way, some people say that the state of omniscience is impossible to attain. The third example expresses doubt as to whether Buddhahood can be achieved at all. There is a teaching to refute these doubts.

As far as comparing buddha nature to gold, the nature of gold is that it is solid, not liquid, so it will revert to the state of being solid. But the nature of the mind is not a state of delusion; therefore, when delusion has been removed, the mind will not revert to a state of delusion. Once there has been recognition of things as they are, one does not revert to the state of not recognizing things as they are.

The irreversibility of Buddhahood is taught in the following ways. The first explanation is that one may strive to attain a result, which one then attains, but, having gained it, one may experience some harm and think, "I have not gained a good result." And so it is possible, if that occurs, that there is reversibility. But with the attainment of Buddhahood, this does not occur because one has become free from all suffering; one has attained the complete benefit of oneself and one has the activity through which one is able to perfectly benefit other beings. So one isn't going to think, "I have achieved Buddhahood, but things are going wrong. Buddhahood has not worked out well." In that case it would be a reversible condition, but that doesn't happen. It is irreversible. That's one reason. Second, there is the nature of what is true and the nature of what is false. If one's realization is a realization that is false, then one is in a state of delusion, which is reversible. But Buddhahood is not like that. Buddhahood is the realization of what is true, the realization of the true nature, which is not reversible. Third, Buddhahood is inseparable from the true nature; it is the inseparability of the union of space and wisdom, and therefore it is not a reversible state. These three reasons explaining why the attainment of Buddhahood is irreversible are given in Dharmakirti's commentary to the Pramana, the *Pramanavinishchaya*.

In this case, having gone through the paths of accumulation, application, vision, and meditation, one has arrived at this realization where one sees the true nature exactly as it is, as the union of clarity and emptiness. When one has the direct wisdom of the true nature, there will be no reversion because one has understood it to be exactly what it is; whereas if one had not understood it, it might be possible that later on one would think, "Oh, I made a mistake. I thought it was like this, but it isn't." But because it has been understood exactly as it is, there will be no change.

(E) THE STAINS DO NOT REAPPEAR AFTER BEING REMOVED

(200) There will never be the appearance of stains
(201) Because there is freedom from differentiating conceptualization.

We may ask, "These stains, these delusions may be removed, but will they not reappear?" The answer is no. Once these delusions or stains have been eliminated, they will not reappear since there has been this recognition. Some may give an example of a person training to jump long distances. Through athletic training a jumper will be able to jump farther and farther, but no amount of training will allow the jumper to jump an infinite number of feet. This argument says that Buddhahood is not omniscient, that one can never attain omniscience because one's understanding of the wisdom of the mind can gradually increase bit by bit, but it cannot become infinite. The refutation of this position is that the body and the mind are not the same. The body obviously has physical limitations, but the mind is different. Once the delusion of the mind is removed, there can come this limitless knowledge. Once these stains on the mind are removed through the recognition of the true nature of things, these delusions or stains will never reappear.

(F) A SUMMARY OF THESE POINTS

(202) Therefore, this mind nature, this buddha,
(203) Is present now but is not known.

Here the text summarizes these arguments by saying the mind is the Buddha. It is present now, but due to its being obscured by these incidental stains, we do not realize it. In our own meditation, realization can arise, but we can also then lose this experience. On the paths of accumulation and application, we are not actually seeing the true nature of phenomena, dharmata; rather, it's something that we are creating with our mind in our meditation. We are imagining the true nature of phenomena; we're not getting a direct vision of it on the paths of accumulation and application. On the path of seeing we achieve the first bodhisattva level and realize the true nature directly.

But seeing the true nature directly doesn't mean that we become a buddha immediately. Because of our habitual patterns and the latencies throughout beginningless time, just seeing the true nature once is not going to bring complete liberation. Rather, we need to follow the fourth path, the path of meditation, in which we continually meditate on the true nature. The bodhisattva needs to meditate continually on the bodhisattva levels because of the strong samsaric tendencies from the past. In our meditation, an experience of realization can suddenly arise, but then it goes away again. These experiences are only temporary because of the power of the tendencies and latencies from the past. So when we experience this just temporarily, we need to continue with diligence and to meditate again and again to counter the strength of these tendencies.

In meditation, then, a good sign or very good quality can arise, but a bad sign can also arise. The instructions say that if good qualities or signs arise, do not rejoice in that, and if a bad sign arises, don't be afraid. Instead just continue to meditate with diligence. If we rejoice and feel confident when a good sign arises, it could result in pride, and as a result our diligence will decrease. Instead, we should just continue applying ourselves to our meditation. Similarly, if something is going wrong in our meditation, we can become disheartened and develop a wrong view. So we shouldn't become disheartened or afraid if something is wrong, but we should persevere with diligence to overcome the power of the latencies. It's said in the oral instructions for meditation that if positive qualities arise, do not rejoice, and if some fault arises, do not become frightened or worried, but continue with diligence.

One time when Gampopa was receiving teachings from Milarepa, he had a vision of the mandala of Hevajra in his meditation. He thought this must be a good sign, so he told Milarepa about it, and Milarepa said, "It's neither good nor bad. Just continue meditating." Another time Gampopa saw the hell full of blackness and became very worried and thought, "This is not good; this means something bad." He told Milarepa, who said, "This is not good; this is not bad. Just carry on meditating." In that same way, we should just continue meditating, not thinking it good or bad. For example, if we look at

the moon and squeeze our eyes, we can see two moons. There is no reason then to think, "I can see two moons. Everybody else can see only one moon, so I'm quite special." On the other hand, we might think, "Oh dear, I'm seeing two moons. Everybody else sees just one. This is not good." We don't need to worry or become frightened, because we only squeezed our eyes. In the same way, if qualities or faults arise in meditation, we don't need to become worried or frightened, but just continue with the meditation.

Question: Does a bodhisattva have the power to cancel the bad karma produced by a sentient being?

Rinpoche: The law of karma is a natural law of cause and effect. Everybody has his or her own karma, which depends on previous deeds. Sentient beings have to exhaust their own karma by themselves. No one else is really able to change a person's karma. One can't do anything about it. A bodhisattva, for example, can teach a method of purifying bad karma, a way of practicing, or a way to gather the accumulation of merit; or he can show the benefits of bodhichitta and how to develop bodhichitta, and so on. Then if the individual, having received these teachings, practices them, develops bodhichitta, and so on, that individual can affect his or her own karma. A person doesn't have the power to directly change someone else's karma, but he or she can help by teaching the methods whereby that person eliminates the bad karma. If, for example, a person has killed someone's father, the son will want revenge. So the killer is in danger of also being killed; but then, if they have a great warrior as a companion, they can stay near him and be safe. Similarly, if one has bad karma and has done bad things in the past, if one has the companionship of the development of bodhichitta, one may be able to escape from that suffering and not have to actually experience it. In that way, it is possible to change things so that one doesn't have to experience the results of one's bad karma.

Q: If one has insight into the emptiness of phenomena, does that not mean that karma has stopped?

R: If one has realized emptiness, then gradually karma will be ex-

hausted. One will not be creating any new karma. But it does not mean that one will immediately cease to experience karmic results.

Q: I am confused about the view that the buddha-qualities have no cause and the statement that the element has no creator but is given this name because it retains its own characteristics. Are characteristics and qualities the same?

R: This first statement, that there's no creator, is not the same as the view that there is no cause. Saying there is no cause in the context of what I taught is saying that the seed of the buddha-qualities has always been there; whereas the wrong view says that there is no buddha nature, that the qualities arise as something new, without there being a cause for them.

Q: Can you give an example for the nature of the mind which is nonexistent?

R: The example is quite an unusual one and was used by previous lamas, by Marpa and others. The example is the orgasm of a young woman during sexual intercourse. You cannot locate this bliss or find what it is; the nature of it is empty, but it is there—you can't say there is nothing there because there is bliss. That is the example.

Q: If there is no self, who or what is reborn? What is transmitted from one life to another? Is it the eighth consciousness or the seventh consciousness?

R: When we speak of a self or "I," there are two aspects to that. There is the conceptually fabricated aspect, and there is the innate belief in a self. The conceptually fabricated aspect, in non-Buddhist systems, is when one states that the self is a certain thing. Some say it is material mixed with the body; some say it is the mind. There is also the belief that there is a self that is permanent and unchanging. This is the innate idea of a self. So although one is happy or unhappy or whatever, there is this self that sometimes is identified with the body and sometimes with the consciousness, but there is no definite thing identified as being the self. Regardless of which view we accept, we think that there is this self that never changes. The Buddha said that

this self that we believe in does not exist. The basis for a belief in a self is the five aggregates of form, sensation, identification, formation, and consciousness. These are just a gathering of many factors, not something that is a single, changeless, permanent thing. So there is no basis for the belief in a self.

We may ask, "If that is so, then what is reborn? What goes on from one life to the next?" It is said that there is a continuum, a continuity from one lifetime to the next. There is a continuum within one lifetime: a little child grows up into an adult; so within that, there is a single continuum. But this is not one single thing. We might say, "Then aren't the self and the continuum the same thing?" They are not; they have completely different characteristics. Take for example a river. If we go to look at the river today and we also went yesterday and will also go tomorrow, each day the same continuum of the river is there. We could say that it is the same continuum today as was there yesterday and the day before and the same as will be there tomorrow. But in fact, there isn't a single drop of water from yesterday that is still there today; all that water has gone, none of it remains. All that's there is this continuity, this continuum.

We mistake this continuum as being a single entity. So we have this continuum from this lifetime to the next lifetime. Even within one lifetime, we think of it as being just one entity, one's self. But, in fact, in this lifetime, we started out being so small we could be held in our mother's arms, and now we are five feet high. And yet we think we have the same body, although in actual fact it's completely different. So it is the same continuum, but the actual nature of the body is completely different.

It is the same for the mind. We may think we have the same mind, but all we have is the same continuum of mind; the mind itself is totally different. When we started off in this life we didn't know how to eat, dress, or even talk. It says in the *Jewel Ornament of Liberation* that the only thing a baby knows how to do is to cry. We started off like that, and gradually we developed, and now we can ask questions, we can learn; we know how to deceive people and how to tell them lies. So the nature of the mind is totally changed. It's the same continuum, but the mind itself is completely different.

Even though our mind and our body are totally different, it is the same continuum, and this is what the Buddha described as the five aggregates. First there is the aggregate of forms, which is the body one has. Second, there is sensations, one's feelings of pleasure or pain. Third is the aggregate of identifications, that by which we are able to identify things. Fourth is the aggregate of mental formations, all the different thoughts that occur within the mind. Fifth is the aggregate of consciousnesses: the visual, auditory, gustatory, olfactory, and tactile consciousnesses, as well as the mental consciousness and so on. All of these factors are gathered together into one collection, and this aggregation of the five skandhas just carries on in a continuum that is completely changing and that goes from one life into the next life and the next life. So the continuum is something that does not have the characteristics or qualities of a permanent, unchanging self.

Q: If the realization of the natural ground is due to the innate quality and the innate quality is the awakened mind, could the mind not revert again?

R: The innate qualities need certain causes and conditions for them to manifest; they are present but they do not manifest. These qualities become manifest with the attainment of Buddhahood, with the removal of delusion. Once they have appeared, they remain. We may mistake a rope for a snake, but when we realize that it's just a rope and not a snake, then we're not going to think again, "There's a snake there." In the same way, once the qualities have become manifest, they will not be obscured again.

Q: My question is about the mentally fabricated emptiness. How can we handle this idea of emptiness, possibly fabricated, that *we* are emptiness?

R: If we have experience of emptiness that arises during meditation, it is an actual realization of emptiness. When we have the understanding of the emptiness of our mind, that is mentally fabricated emptiness. Gradually, as we meditate, we will have the realization of emptiness.

Jamgön Kongtrul has said that the reason we do not see the true

nature of the mind is not that it is too profound or too difficult to grasp. We cannot see it because it is too close and too easy to grasp. It confuses us and we cannot see it. But gradually through meditating we will eventually see it.

Q: We hear a lot about the dark age that is coming or is upon us, and that the Buddha's teachings are going to decline. How does that fit with the uninterrupted activity of the nirmanakaya?

R: Although it is said that the Buddha's teachings are going to decline or come to an end, they may also redevelop. We go up and we come down. Even if they cease, there may be some people who are practicing and some people who are not practicing; maybe they cease in one world, but they flourish in another world. So in that way, there is unceasing activity.

Q: If during one's meditation, one is able to experience clarity or awareness that is there between the thoughts or when thoughts are not actually there, is it possible in daily life to exist with that same sort of awareness?

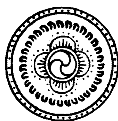
R: In daily life during one's activities, one does have thoughts. So at that time, one practices by having mindfulness and awareness and attentiveness. And in the actual meditation session, if it's shamatha, then one needs to subdue thoughts, and in vipashyana practice, insight practice, if one can recognize the nature of thoughts, then thoughts will not be harmful.

Q: On what level does the idea of nonduality become something really practical? Is this something very advanced, perhaps on one of the bodhisattva levels?

R: In terms of nonduality, there is the meditation state and there is the post-meditation state. There are also the Sutra tradition and the Vajrayana tradition. The Sutra tradition holds that nonduality occurs in the meditation state at the first bodhisattva level and nonduality occurs in the post-meditation state at the eighth bodhisattva level. In the Vajrayana, there are the twelve yogas, which are the four yogas—one-pointedness, freedom from complication, one taste, and

the state without meditation—each subdivided into a lesser, a middle, and a greater stage. So there's a lesser one-pointedness level, a middle one-pointedness level, and a greater one-pointedness level. In the one-pointedness level, there is still duality in both the meditation state and the post-meditation state. In the second stage, freedom from complication, there is nonduality in the state of meditation. In the fourth stage, the absence of meditation, nonduality occurs in both the meditation state and the post-meditation state.

7
DESCRIBING BUDDHA NATURE THROUGH QUOTATIONS



WE HAVE COMPLETED the fourth major section of the treatise on the detailed description of buddha nature and now come to the last section, which is the conclusion. Just as this treatise began with quotations, it concludes with quotations. This section is in four parts, with a quotation from *The Adornment of Sutras,* a quotation from Nagarjuna, a quotation from the *Uttaratantra,* and a statement on the meaning of sutras in general.

E. Describing buddha nature through quotations

1. *From* The Adornment of Sutras

(204) When there is realization, at that time,
(205) Just as the heat of metal
(206) And the defects of sight cease,
(207) One cannot say that there is existence or nonexistence
(208) In Buddhahood mind and wisdom.

First is the quotation from *The Adornment of Sutras,* and Jamgön Kongtrul gives a commentary to this line, in which he says that realization of buddha nature, or buddha essence, is due to having listened

to the teachings, contemplated them, and meditated on them. Buddha nature is realized through listening, contemplating, and meditating. This is the explanation according to the Sutra path. In terms of the Mahamudra path, realization occurs through the combination of the blessing of a true teacher and the arising of devotion within the pupil; through the combination of these two, buddha nature, the nature of the mind, manifests. Jamgön Kongtrul says buddha nature is realized either through the Sutra path of listening, contemplating, and meditating or through blessing and devotion of the Mahamudra path.

When buddha nature is realized, all the defilements and delusions cease. This is the same as when metal that has been heated cools down and the heat is gone. Or it is similar to the illness of conjunctivitis: when one is cured of it, the illness is gone. In the same way, at the time of Buddhahood, there is freedom from delusion and the defilements. It's as if they are separate things. But since the delusions and mind poisons are purified, one cannot say that they are existent; because the qualities of wisdom have arisen, one also cannot say that they are nonexistent. In fact, the buddha-qualities of wisdom exist at the same time as the delusions. When the faults have been removed, there is the appearance of wisdom.

In terms of "existence or nonexistence," the word "Buddha" in Tibetan is made up of two syllables, *sang* and *gye,* with the first syllable meaning "purified" and the second meaning "developed" or "increased." So one says that it is not existent in terms of the purification, that all of the negative qualities have been removed; and in terms of the buddha-qualities, the thirty-two qualities of liberation and the thirty-two qualities of maturation, these buddha-qualities manifest, develop, and increase.

2. *From* Twenty Lines on the Mahayana

(209) Because in the sacred meaning there is no birth,
(210) There is also no liberation there.
(211) As is space, so is Buddhahood:
(212) It has the same characteristic as beings.
(213) As "this side" and "that side" are birthless,

(214) There is not even a reality to nirvana.
(215) The composite are truly empty.
(216) This is the experience of omniscient wisdom.

The next quotation is from Nagarjuna's *Twenty Lines on the Mahayana,* which says that all the delusions, all the stains and obscurations, have no existence. Since beginningless time they are without any real substance. When these are removed, one cannot say that there is liberation either, because if the mind poisons had a real existence, then there would be a real liberation, but as the mind poisons have no existence, in actual fact, there is no such thing as liberation either. So it is said that Buddhahood has the nature of space and beings also have the nature of space.

Beings and buddhas have the same qualities, this characteristic of not having any real nature. Buddhahood is completely pure, and ordinary beings ultimately are also completely pure. It is said that "this side" and "that side" have no existence. "This side" refers to samsara, the situation of beings in a state of delusion. Beings live within delusion, but the delusion has no real nature. It is just as when a rope is mistaken for a snake. There is the delusion of a snake being present, and we feel fear, but in fact, the snake has no reality. Yet we perceive a snake; we have the delusion of a snake, and this creates the fear. When we see that there is no snake, we are freed from that delusion. In the same way, there is delusion in samsara, but that delusion has no real nature. But buddha nature is present, so when the delusion is removed, there is liberation.

Because samsara, "this side," has no real existence, therefore "that side"—nirvana, liberation from samsara—has no real existence either. It is said that everything that is composite has no real existence and is empty. But ordinary beings are not able to realize that samsara and nirvana have no real existence. It can be known only with the ultimate wisdom.

3. *From the* Uttaratantra

(217) It is subtle, so it is not the object of learning.
(218) It is ultimate, so it is not the object of contemplation.

(219) The dharmata is profound, so it is not the object of
(220) Worldly meditation, and so on.

Next there is a quotation from the *Uttaratantra* saying that since buddha nature is so profound, it cannot be the object of the wisdom that comes through receiving the teachings, contemplating them, or meditating on them. As for the first of these, since buddha nature, or buddha essence, is very subtle, we cannot say, "This is what buddha nature is," based only on the wisdom that comes from listening or studying the teachings.

The next line says that not only is buddha nature subtle, it is also ultimate, so it cannot be totally grasped using the wisdom that comes from contemplation. The reason is that the wisdom that comes from learning and contemplation can be included within the classification of ignorance. This is because there are the two truths, the ultimate truth and the relative, conventional truth. We have our intellect, which conceives of things in terms of relative concepts and terms. Studying is still within the dualism of subject and object, and therefore it is not the ultimate truth. From learning and contemplation we get just a rough idea of the way things are. We think, "This is more or less how things are." But we are not able to see the truth with great clarity, and for that reason, buddha nature is not an object for the wisdom that comes from contemplation.

It is also said that the dharmata, the nature of phenomena, is so profound it is not the object of worldly meditation. In terms of the wisdom that arises from meditation, there are two kinds of meditation. First is the meditation where one has a direct recognition, in which there is the wisdom that sees the true nature of the mind. This meditation is able to see buddha nature. Second is mundane or worldly meditation, which is not like that. In worldly shamatha practice, we develop a state of peace and stability, and in worldly vipashyana, we just develop clarity or luminosity. So we meditate in accordance with what we have learned. But this meditation is focused on the relative level, not the actual nature of phenomena. Therefore buddha nature, or the true nature of phenomena, is

beyond the experience of mundane shamatha and vipashyana meditation because they are engaged only with the relative level.

This section teaches that there are many different kinds of teachings: the provisional teachings and the definitive teachings. The Buddha did not teach on buddha nature, or buddha essence, in all of his teachings because someone might think, "The self and buddha nature are the same." So the Buddha said, "I have not taught this in order to avoid its being mistaken for a self." Therefore the Buddha in the second turning gave the teachings on the emptiness of a person and the emptiness of phenomena. Having been taught this, people understood that things have no real nature. Then the Buddha in the third turning taught buddha nature so people would understand that the true nature was a union of emptiness and wisdom. Buddha nature, or buddha essence, does not have the reality of being a solid thing. The version in this section on the *Uttaratantra* shows how this teaching was too profound to understand.

4. *The meaning of the sutras in general*

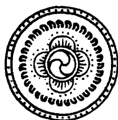
> (221) The field of experience of self-knowing wisdom,
> (222) The self-arising faith, gives rise to the ultimate.
> (223) Oh! Because they do not understand this,
> (224) The children wander in the ocean of samsara.

Next follows a summary of the meaning taught in the sutras and the tantras. We had quotations from *The Adornment of Sutras* and the *Uttaratantra* and from Nagarjuna saying how this buddha nature cannot be realized through learning and contemplation and meditation or understood by ordinary beings. So how can this buddha nature be realized? Buddha nature is realized by the wisdom that knows itself, self-knowing wisdom (Tib. *rang rig*). There is the true nature of the mind that knows itself, and buddha nature lies within the field of experience of the wisdom that knows itself. This wisdom arises through "self-arising faith," meaning that one gains this realization through having trust and conviction in the Buddha's teachings. With the Buddha's teachings, one gains a correct view and receives its blessings, and then one attains the realization. In the Kagyu tradition, we need to

develop a correct view, to analyze through wisdom, and then to meditate. We need to have blessings. It is said in the Kagyu lineage prayer, "Devotion is the head of meditation." If someone has a head, they can talk, they can eat, they can do everything. But without a head, nothing can be done. In the same way, devotion is the head of meditation. If we have devotion, we will be able to meditate and then gain realization. Therefore it is said that we will gain a conviction in the teachings and be able to attain this self-knowing wisdom.

Gampopa said that to attain the certain view, we must look into the mind; the view cannot be found anywhere else. If we try to find it anywhere other than in the mind itself, it is like a strong man's search for his jewel. There is an old story about a very powerful wrestler who had a jewel inset into his forehead so that he would not lose it. When he retired, because the skin on his head grew downward over the jewel, he forgot about it. One day he searched frantically for the jewel everywhere, thinking he had lost it, until a friend reminded him that he had always had the jewel on his forehead.

8
THE CONCLUSION



NOW WE HAVE REACHED the final section of *A Treatise on Buddha Nature*, where Rangjung Dorje concludes his presentation on buddha nature, buddha essence.

V. THE CONCLUSION

A. How this work was written

(225) Through the power of the great Shakyamuni,
(226) Of Manjushri, Maitreya, and Avalokiteshvara,
(227) This was written by Rangjung Dorje.

The Third Karmapa Rangjung Dorje says that he composed this text so that beings in the future would be able to understand buddha nature and to realize the presence of buddha nature directly. Rangjung Dorje says that he has attained the ability and inspiration to compose this text from the Shakyamuni Buddha. The Shakyamuni Buddha gave eighty-four thousand different kinds of Dharma teachings. By receiving and understanding these teachings, particularly the teachings that give the definitive meaning; through the blessing of Manjushri that led to wisdom; through the kindness of Maitreya who composed the five works of Maitreya, including the *Uttaratantra* that teaches buddha nature; and through Avalokiteshvara, the embodiment of compassion, he has been able to compose this text. From the power of these beings, he was able to see the true nature of phenomena, and,

having seen it, he was able to compose this text that teaches what the true nature is.

B. The aspirational prayer

> (228) May all beings have unmistaken knowledge
> (229) And full attainment of buddha nature!

The Third Karmapa then wrote an aspirational prayer that all beings may have unmistaken knowledge and full attainment of buddha nature. He believes that this is a very important teaching on the presence of buddha nature and that beings need a correct understanding of buddha nature. Therefore he has written this text without error, and he prays that beings will be able to understand it without error. To have this direct recognition in meditation is very good, but one needs to be able to bring it to its ultimate conclusion, the state of Buddhahood. Therefore Rangjung Dorje prays that people may attain the unmistaken and ultimate conclusion of Buddhahood.

C. The concluding statement

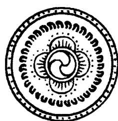
> (230) This completes the definitive presentation of the buddha nature which is the essence of the Vajrayana.
> (231) Shubham [Auspiciousness]!

Rangjung Dorje teaches the important point that buddha nature, or buddha essence, is present within all beings, and all the qualities are present within buddha nature. The presence of buddha nature with all the good qualities is presented in this text to allow us to study, contemplate, and then meditate on this topic. This is said to be the essence of the definitive teachings in the sutras and the profound tantras. It is also said to be the essence of the Vajrayana as described at the end of the text. Buddha nature was first taught within the Sutra teachings, which themselves are made up of the three turnings of the Dharma wheel. At first the Buddha gave provisional teachings. In the second turning of the wheel of Dharma, the nature of emptiness was primarily taught, with little mention of buddha nature. In the third

turning of the wheel of Dharma, the teachings on wisdom and the presence of buddha nature, or buddha essence, were taught.

In India there were two traditions: the tradition of the deep view and the tradition of the vast conduct. The tradition of the deep view comes from Nagarjuna; emptiness was taught primarily, with little mention of buddha nature. In Asanga's tradition of the vast conduct, buddha nature was taught primarily. These traditions were brought into Tibet, where they were divided into two main traditions called Rangtong and Shentong. The Rangtong ("self-empty") tradition taught that the nature of all phenomena was emptiness, and the Shentong ("empty of others") tradition taught primarily the presence of buddha nature, or buddha essence. In the Shentong tradition, this was done chiefly through reasoning, showing that there is buddha nature, that there is the inseparability of wisdom and emptiness, so that there is emptiness but at the same time there is also the quality of luminosity. So knowing and wisdom are present. This text was presented primarily from the Shentong view, although it was also conjoined with the teaching on ordinary mind, which is the meditation of directly seeing the nature of the mind. So the scholastic tradition of the Shentong is, in this text, conjoined with the Mahamudra tradition of meditation on the nature of the mind. It is therefore described as being the essence of the Vajrayana.

9
THE MEDITATION PRACTICE OF THIS TREATISE



MANY GENERATIONS have passed since this text was written in the thirteenth century, so that it may seem like a very ancient text and rather obscure and difficult. We might think, "What's the point to a lot of it? There are all these refutations of the Bön and Hindu religions in it, and it seems rather meaningless." However, the text itself presents the final or true meaning that is conveyed within the Sutra teachings. In terms of the teaching, it presents the definitive meaning, and in terms of the practice, it is related to the meditation of Mahamudra. Therefore it is a text that will be very beneficial to read again and again. If we can do that, it will be very good.

Some people feel that they just want to meditate and that there isn't much point in doing a lot of studying and learning. There are others who feel that learning and studying is important and don't feel interested in just practicing. There are many different dispositions among people, and so the Buddha presented his teachings in many different ways. However, to practice we need to know the actual methods of practice, the way that we should practice, and the result that comes from practicing. This makes it necessary to study texts. But studying by itself is not enough; we need also to join study

with the actual practice of meditation. If we study only when we really need the benefit from our study, we won't gain benefit. We have to practice as well as study.

There are many Tibetan Buddhist books on the Vajrayana. There are books written with the idea of pleasing the reader by putting things as pleasantly as possible, in order to sell a lot of books and make a lot of money. Rangjung Dorje, however, composed his text entirely with the intention of benefiting the practitioner, so his work is very different from the books that are very pleasant to read.

There are so many books on Buddhism, and the kind of books we need are those giving the teachings that have been preserved correctly and purely and haven't become mixed with worldly concerns, politics, and so on. In Tibet, the teachings have been preserved correctly and purely, and this is due to the kindness of the Himalayan mountains allowing the Tibetans to practice the Dharma in isolation without outside influences. Other Buddhist teachings have lost their continuity and come to an end, but the Tibetan teachings are still being transmitted continuously.

However, in 1959, with the Chinese invasion of Tibet, it seemed as if this transmission of the Tibetan teachings would come to an end. When I arrived in India from Tibet, I didn't have a single page of a book with me, and I thought, "I'm going to forget my Tibetan." There were no Tibetan books to be read anywhere, and I was really afraid of forgetting my Tibetan and afraid that the transmission of these teachings could come to an end. But then some Tibetan lamas, with a lot of hard work, went about seeking out copies of texts, finding them, publishing them, and teaching the meaning of these texts. And with help from Western countries, the Tibetans were able to study and practice these teachings so that, although the transmission of some teachings may have ceased, the transmission of most of the teachings has been preserved. Some will give the empowerments and others will be receiving empowerments, and people will study texts and understand them, and in that way, most of the teachings have been preserved.

In Tibet, the Karma Kagyu were a smaller sect and not that well established because they didn't have any state support. The Gelugpa

school had plenty of state support, and so they printed many, many texts and had monasteries with thousands of monks and many great scholars. The Karma Kagyu in Tibet had only small monasteries scattered all over, with maybe one or two lamas with some realization or experience here and there. But even though the Karma Kagyu was not that well established in Tibet, due to the hard work of the Karmapa and of Kalu Rinpoche, the Karma Kagyu lineage has prospered. They worked very hard to preserve the transmission of the teachings and the practice of the Karma Kagyu so that the teachings would not die out.

The reason the Karma Kagyu has prospered more than other traditions is that, for example, the Gelugpa sect is headed by a very special lama, the Dalai Lama, but he also has to be concerned with politics. Therefore he's not able to devote himself completely to the religious side of things. The Sakya and Nyingma traditions had married lamas who had sons and daughters, sisters and brothers, nephews and nieces, and so on to be concerned about and to look after. In the Kagyu tradition, there were the Karmapa and Kalu Rinpoche, who had nothing to worry or think about except food and clothing, so they could be entirely devoted to Dharma activities. Their thoughts would be, "Can I make a retreat center here? What about making a college here by getting these monks to meditate, by getting these texts taught, by getting these empowerments given," and so on. They would be thinking purely in terms of the transmission of the teachings and their preservation, and so everything would be seen in terms of the transmission of the Dharma such as the Six Yogas of Naropa, the Six Yogas of Niguma, the teachings on Mahamudra, and so on. And everything has gone very well.

The Karmapa published and printed the Kangyur, the Tibetan collection of the Buddha's teaching, and the Tengyur, the collection of the Indian commentaries on the Buddha's teachings.[18] He established a monastery and temple at Rumtek in Sikkim and told monks, "If you don't have anything to eat, then come and live here. You'll have something to eat, and you'll be able to practice and study here." Kalu Rinpoche also established a retreat center and said to monks, "Come to my retreat center. If you don't know how to recite the texts,

I'll teach you how to recite the texts. If you don't know how to meditate, I'll teach you that. If you don't have the empowerments, I'll give them to you. If you don't have any food, I'll provide the food. Just come along and be in my retreat center."

Therefore in the Karma Kagyu tradition, the full transmissions of all the teachings and the practice have been preserved and transmitted. In general, the teachings from Milarepa and Marpa and Gampopa have all been passed down, and, in particular, with the changing of the times after 1959, none of these teachings has gone to waste; they have all been preserved. There is the complete range of the teachings and practice, and if we're going to practice or receive teachings, we don't have to wonder, "Are these teachings good enough to receive? Should I get my practice from someplace else?" There's no need to worry because there's perfect transmission of all of these teachings and instructions for us to be able to practice and learn.

We need to study texts and we need to practice meditation. Some people may feel very strong diligence and very strong motivation to achieve liberation or to leave samsara, and therefore they wish to get some kind of result very soon. But that is not so good. What one needs is more of a long-term exertion. If one has very intense motivation to attain liberation and leave samsara and one thinks, "I don't need anything; I don't need food or money. All I want is to practice the Dharma and attain liberation," that is not so good. One has to live in this world and to work. So one should have more of a long-term diligence, thinking not in terms of getting some fast result from one's practice through very intense motivation, but rather of having a very stable and steady practice, to continue one's life in the world and to accompany that with meditation and study. That doesn't mean that results will occur suddenly; it means that there will be a steady, gradual development.

There was a Mr. Mok in Hong Kong, who read *The Life of Milarepa* and became very enthusiastic. He decided that he was going to be just like Milarepa, so he gave up his work, he gave up everything, and decided to go and practice in the Yolmo Valley, which is in a remote part of Nepal where there is a cave in which Milarepa prac-

ticed. So with just a few texts, he made his way to Yolmo, and on the way, he bought a deerskin to sit on because that's what it is said Milarepa used to sit on. In Yolmo it's very cold. All Mr. Mok had was this deerskin he had bought en route, and for a month he suffered cold and hunger. After one month, he returned to Kathmandu, but he had already given everything away and didn't even have money to buy a ticket to get back to Hong Kong. That kind of enthusiastic diligence is obviously not a good thing.

The teachings and the texts say that one shouldn't have a great attachment to one's relatives, to one's spouse, to one's sons or daughters, or to one's wealth. The teachings say this, but there is a danger that someone might misunderstand and think, "This means that I don't need any of my wealth or possessions; I don't need my wife or husband or my children. I'm just going to live on my own and practice the Dharma." But in fact, if one lives with one's family and is kind and loving to them and looks after them, that is also part of Dharma practice. So if one does that and practices the Dharma, that is very good.

But if one is inactive or idle, one obviously won't be able to practice the Dharma. One does need to have diligence and effort sometimes. It's good to be able to develop the post-meditation state, to be able to practice while doing one's work. It's good to develop diligence to meditate and also to be able to continue the meditation in one's daily life and in one's work. That's very beneficial.

NOTES

1. Niguma was the sister of Naropa, and her six yogas are similar to the Six Yogas of Naropa. The Shangpa Kagyu tradition has been carried on by the late Kalu Rinpoche.
2. The Tibetan word *sang-gye kham* (*sangs-rgyad khams*) or the Sanskrit *tathagatagarbha* is translated here as "buddha nature."
3. The teachings of the Buddha can be divided into two types. The first type, the provisional teachings, were taught to help individuals enter the path but do not contain the entire meaning of what was taught. The second type, the definitive teachings, contain the entire truth about the nature of reality and were usually taught to those individuals who were developed enough to understand the true import of the whole truth about the nature of reality.
4. *Thamal gyi shepa* (*tha-mal gyi shes-pa*), usually translated as "ordinary mind," does not refer to our ordinary samsaric mind but rather to our mind as it is when it is not obscured by the defilements and cognitive obscurations.
5. When we translate the Tibetan word *salwa* (*gsal-ba*) as "clarity" or "luminosity" in English, it may sound like something very intense, such as a bright electric light, but it's not like that. It means that when you look into the mind, you cannot find anything, yet this does not mean that the mind stops so that you become like a corpse. There is still the presence of a kind of awareness; one can still understand, one can still see things, and so on. This continues, so there isn't just a blankness. In relative terms, this is called clarity, and then, as this clarity increases, it can become the wisdom of the Buddha, the wisdom that knows the nature of all things and the wisdom that knows all the variety of appear-

ances. So this clarity can develop into that wisdom. [Thrangu Rinpoche]

6. The union or inseparability of luminosity and emptiness refers to the fact that mind is empty, yet at the same time it is knowing, aware, and so it also has luminosity. The emptiness could not exist without the luminosity, and the luminosity could not exist without the emptiness.
7. There are the five sensory consciousnesses of sight, hearing, smelling, tasting, and bodily sensation. These consciousnesses perceive sensory input directly without analyzing it. Then there is the sixth consciousness, the mental consciousness, which does all kinds of integration and evaluation of the sensory consciousnesses. Then there is the seventh, or afflicted, consciousness, which is the ever-present belief in an "I." Finally, these seven consciousnesses are held together by the eighth consciousness, the ground or alaya consciousness, which also functions to store the imprints of everything happening in the sixth consciousness.
8. This is considered an unidentified sutra because although Rangjung Dorje quoted these lines from Asanga's *Mahayana-uttaratantra-shastra-vyakhya* (Tengyur 4025), the original sutra has apparently been lost.
9. The Rangtong position follows Nagarjuna very closely and insists that everything is empty and therefore there cannot be buddha nature pervading everything. This position is taken mostly by the Gelugpas. The Shentong tradition, to which Rangjung Dorje, Jamgön Kongtrul, and Thrangu Rinpoche belong, maintains that buddha nature does pervade everything and that it is characteristic of emptiness. Because it pervades everything, it makes it possible for all sentient beings to achieve enlightenment.
10. There are two levels of reality, often called the two truths: *kundzop* (*kun-rdzob*) and *dondam* (*don-dam*) in Tibetan. Kundzop refers to the world as perceived by ordinary (unenlightened) beings, and this reality is an illusion, in that we believe that objects are solid and enduring. We call this relative truth, or conventional reality, because this is what most people perceive and believe in. However, a person who is enlightened sees that phenomena are

actually empty of inherent nature and therefore sees the world as it really is. This is referred to as absolute truth, or ultimate truth (*dondam*).

11. These latencies are called *bagchag* (*bag-chags*) in Tibetan. According to the Chittamatra school, the mind is made up of eight consciousnesses. The eighth consciousness, the alaya consciousness, is a kind of storehouse of karma. With unenlightened persons the alaya consciousness stores external phenomena as really existing, and this creates latencies that lead one into believing in the delusion that everything is solid and real.
12. In Tibetan medicine and psychology there are subtle channels (Tib. *tsa*) through which energies flow. Thoughts are considered movements of these energies.
13. Rangjung Dorje explains the three characteristics according to the Shentong tradition, where all eight consciousnesses, including the ground consciousness, are included within the dependent, and the buddha nature is the absolute.
14. It is free from the four extremes of existing, not existing, both existing and not existing, and neither existing nor not existing.
15. The five certainties of the sambhogakaya—location, pupils, teacher, teaching, and time—are discussed on page 116.
16. The principal deity of the Tibetan Bön tradition, pronounced "Cha" in Tibetan.
17. A wish-fulfilling jewel and a wish-fulfilling tree give what one wants without thought, and the drum of the deities automatically sounds the Dharma.
18. Before 1959, the Karmapa went to Derge, the great publishing center in Eastern Tibet, and asked for the wooden blocks for the Kangyur and the Tengyur, and at great expense he transported these thousands of wooden blocks to India. Everyone at the time thought this was rather strange, but then the Chinese invaded Tibet, and one of the first things they did was take the Kangyur and Tengyur out of every monastery in Tibet and burn them.

GLOSSARY

Abhidharma (*chos mngon pa*) One of the three collections of the Buddha's teachings, along with the vinaya and the sutras, that compose the Tripitaka, although in the Tibetan canon it consists entirely of commentarial literature, with only sutras and vinaya in the collected teachings of the Buddha itself. The Abhidharma is a systematic presentation of the basic constituents of the Buddha's teachings.

absolute See **characteristics, three.**

afflicted consciousness (*nyon yid;* Skt. *klistajñana*) The seventh consciousness, a subtle, pervasive sense of "I" that is continuously present. See also **consciousnesses, eight.**

aggregates, five (*phung po lnga;* Skt. *skandha*) The five physical and mental constituents of beings. They are aggregations of form (*gzugs*), feeling (*tshor ba*), identification (*'du shes*), mental activity (*'du byed*), and consciousness (*rnam shes*).

alaya (*kun gzhi*) The Tibetan means "the basis of all." When its nature is not recognized, it is called the alayavijñana, the ground consciousness. When it is recognized, it is the ground wisdom. See also **consciousnesses, eight; ground consciousness.**

arhat (*dgra bcom pa*) The Sanskrit literally means "worthy one," but the Tibetan literally means "foe destroyer," based upon the Sanskrit Nirukta tradition of creative etymologies. In the Mahayana tradition it has come to mean one who has achieved the final goal of the nirvana of the Hinayana path. While still living they are termed "arhat with residue," which refers to the physical body as the result of

residual karma. When they have passed into nirvana, they are classed as "arhat without residue." In that state of quiescence they are no longer able to help beings. According to the *Lotus Sutra*, the Buddha eventually awakens them from this state so that they can proceed to full buddhahood.

Asanga (4th cent.) An Indian philosopher who founded the Chittamatra school and wrote the five works of Maitreya, including the *Uttaratantra.* He was the brother of Vasubandhu.

asravas (*zag pa*) Literally, influx. This generally refers to afflictions, but in a Buddhist context to all the contaminations or imperfections that arise from being in samsara.

ayatanas (*skye mched*) The Sanskrit means "basis" and the Tibetan translation literally means "birth and development." The twelve bases of perception, consisting of the six sense faculties (sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch, and the mental faculty) and the six sense objects (sights, sounds, smells, tastes, bodily sensations, and mental objects).

bhumi See **bodhisattva levels.**

bindu See **nadi, vayu, and bindu.**

bodhichitta (*byang chub kyi sems*) Literally, enlightenment-mind. Bodhichitta has two aspects. Relative bodhichitta is the aspiration to attain enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings. Ultimate bodhichitta is the realization of emptiness.

bodhisattva (*byang chub sems dpa'*) A practitioner of the Mahayana who, having given rise to bodhichitta, has vowed to attain enlightenment in order to free all sentient beings from samsara. The term encompasses ordinary beings but is particularly associated with those who have attained the enlightenment of the bodhisattva levels.

bodhisattva levels (*sa;* Skt. *bhumi*) The ten levels or stages of realization of the enlightened bodhisattva.

buddha nature (*bde gshegs snying po;* Skt. *tathagatagarbha*) The essence of enlightenment that exists in all sentient beings, which re-

mains unchanged from the state of an ordinary being to buddhahood. Also called buddha essence; sugatagarbha; tathagatagarbha.

Chandrakirti (c. 600–650) An Indian master who was a principal exponent of the Middle Way school. Chandrakirti is the author of the *Madhyamakavatara (Entering the Middle Way)*, among other texts.

characteristics, three (*mtshan nyid gsum;* Skt. *trisvabhava*) In the Chittamatra philosophy, all phenomena are included within these three categories: the absolute (*yongs grub;* Skt. *parinishpanna*), the dependent (*gzhan dbang;* Skt. *paratantra*), and the fabricated (*kun brtags;* Skt. *parikalpita*). The absolute is the true nature of phenomena. The dependent is the continuum of perceptions independent of conceptualization. The fabricated refers to phenomena that are nothing but perceptions but to the ordinary mind appear as a subject-object duality that in the Chittamatra tradition is called the grasper (*'dzin pa*) and the grasped (*bzung ba*).

Chittamatra (*sems tsam*) One of the four schools of Indian Buddhist philosophy studied in Tibet; also known as Yogachara. Founded by Asanga, it holds that appearances are only mind. The name literally means "Mind Only."

clarity (*gsal ba*) The mind's intrinsic quality of knowing.

completion stage (*rdzogs rim;* Skt. *sampannakrama*) The Vajrayana practice of such methods as the Six Yogas of Naropa which are practiced on the basis of a creation-stage practice. It can also refer to insight meditation practices and at its simplest form the meditative state following the dissolution of the deity in a creation-stage practice.

consciousnesses, eight While the Madhyamaka tradition accepted the existence of only six consciousnesses, the Chittamatra school taught an additional seventh and eighth consciousnesses: the five sensory consciousnesses (the visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, and tactile consciousnesses), the mental (sixth) consciousness, the afflicted (seventh) consciousness, and the ground (eighth) consciousness.

creation stage (*bskyed rim;* Skt. *utpattikrama*) Meditation practices involving the generation or creation of a deity and its subsequent visualizations and mantra repetitions.

defilements (*nyon mongs;* Skt. *klesha*) The five mental afflictions, or mind poisons: attachment or desire, anger or aggression, ignorance, pride, and envy.

definitive meaning (*nges don*) Teachings on the ultimate truth, which do not require interpretation. Compare **provisional meaning.**

dependent See **characteristics, three.**

dharmadhatu (*chos dbyings*) The empty nature of phenomena, though in other contexts it can mean the entire expanse of relative phenomena.

dharmakaya See **kayas, three.**

Dharmakirti (7th cent.) An Indian master associated with the Chittamatra school who was, after Dignaga, the founder of the Buddhist tradition of logic.

dharmata (*chos nyid*) The true nature of phenomena.

dhatu (*khams*) Element. The eighteen dhatus consist of the twelve ayatanas (the six sense faculties and six sense objects) together with the six sense consciousnesses.

Dzogchen (*rdzogs pa chen po*) Literally, Great Perfection. The highest teachings of the Nyingma and Bön schools.

fabricated See **characteristics, three.**

fearlessnesses, four (*mi 'jigs pa bzhi*) Qualities that arise from a buddha's realization. Buddhas are fearless in asserting the elimination of their own faults, in asserting the qualities of their own realization, in showing the path to others, and in showing others obstacles to the path.

form kayas See **kayas, three.**

Gampopa (1079–1153) Sonam Rinchen, also known as Dakpo Rinpoche, Gampopa was a physician turned monk who became a student of Milarepa and the founder of the first Kagyu monastery, Dalha Gampo, and thus the founder of the monastic tradition of the Kagyu. He was the teacher of Dusum Khyenpa, the First Karmapa.

ground consciousness (*kun gzhi'i rnam shes;* Skt. *alayavijñana*) The eighth consciousness, also called the ground consciousness, is the basis for the arising of the other seven consciousnesses and the repository for karmic causes. See also **consciousnesses, eight.**

Hinayana (*theg pa dman pa*) Literally, Lesser Vehicle. The teachings based on the first turning of the wheel of Dharma. The final goal of the Hinayana path is considered in the Mahayana to be that of the arhat, though these schools, such as the Theravada, also have the alternative of making a commitment to become a bodhisattva, one who aims to achieve buddhahood though a much longer path of the accumulation of merit.

Jamgön Kongtrul Lodro Thaye (1813–1899) A Kagyu master of the Rimé, or ecumenical, movement. He left an extensive body of teachings known as the five treasures, which range from the three-volume *Treasury of Knowledge* to the fifty-four-volume *Treasury of Termas.*

Kagyu (*bka' brgyud*) One of the four principal traditions of Tibetan Buddhism, founded by Marpa, which has included many lineages, such as the Tsalpa, Drukpa, Drigung, Talung, and Karma Kagyu.

Kalachakra (*dus kyi 'khor lo*) Literally, Wheel of Time. A tantra which is a further development beyond the other highest yoga tantras and therefore sometimes classed by itself as the nondual tantra.

Karmapa The successive heads of the Karma Kagyu lineage. The Karmapas were the first incarnate lamas recognized in Tibet. Dusum Khyenpa, the First Gyalwang Karmapa (1110–1193), was a student of Gampopa. The Seventeenth Karmapa Ogyen Trinley Dorje was born in 1985.

kayas, three (*sku gsum*; Skt. *trikaya*) Literally, three bodies. The dharmakaya, sambhogakaya, and nirmanakaya, which are aspects of buddhahood. The dharmakaya (*cho sku*), or truth body, is a buddha's own realization, experienced only by a buddha. The sambhogakaya (*longs sku*), or enjoyment body, is a continuous, divine manifestation perceived only by enlightened beings. The nirmanakaya (*sprul sku*), or emanation body, is the manifestation in the world such as the historical Buddha, which can be perceived by ordinary beings. The nirmanakaya and sambhogakaya are known collectively as the rupakaya (*gzugs sku*), or form body, which benefits others; the dharmakaya benefits the buddha alone.

Madhyamaka See **Middle Way school.**

Mahamudra (*phyag rgya chen po*) Literally, Great Seal. Teachings on the practice of directly realizing the mind's true nature. It is taught that everything is "stamped by the seal" of the true nature, so that in the mind there is nothing to be eliminated and nothing to be added. It is particularly based on the songs of the siddha Saraha and the works of subsequent masters such as Tilopa, Naropa, and Maitripa.

mahasiddha (*grub thob*) The eighty-four mahasiddhas were Indian masters who had accomplished the goal of the Vajrayana while living a diverse variety of lifestyles. They include figures of great importance for the Tibetan Kagyu lineage, such as Saraha, Luyipa, Tilopa, Naropa, and Dombhipa.

Mahayana (*theg pa chen po*) Literally, Great Vehicle, a term introduced by the *Lotus Sutra*. It is composed of the teachings of the Buddha's second and third turnings of the wheel of Dharma.

Marpa Lotsawa (1012–1097) Marpa the Translator, a student of the Indian master Naropa and teacher of Milarepa. He was a Tibetan layman who made several journeys to India in order to bring Dharma teachings to Tibet and thereby originated the Karma Kagyu lineage in Tibet.

mental events (*sems byung*) Within the Abhidharma tradition

there is a classification of fifty-one types of mental events, subdivided into five ever-present mental events; five determinative states, eleven virtuous mental events, twenty-six negative mental events, and four variable mental events.

Middle Way school (*dbu ma;* Skt. *Madhyamaka*) One of the four Indian Buddhist traditions of philosophy studied in Tibet. It was founded by Nagarjuna, and its later masters include Chandrakirti and Shantideva. Based in particular on the Prajñaparamita sutras, it emphasizes the teachings of emptiness and compassion.

Milarepa (1040–1123) Milarepa was a yogin student of Marpa and the teacher of Gampopa. He spent his life in solitary mountain hermitages and was famous throughout Tibet as a result of the 1488 biography and song collection composed and compiled by Tsangnyön Heruka.

nadi See **nadi, vayu, and bindu.**

nadi, vayu, and bindu (*rtsa rlung thig le*) The nadis (*rtsa*) are the subtle channels of the body, through which travel vayu (*rlung*), the subtle airs or winds of the body, one of which is prana (*srog lung*), the life-force wind. Bindus (*thig le*) are concentrated drops of vital energy that are carried on the winds.

Nagarjuna (c. 2nd cent.) Indian scholar renowned for his texts expounding the logical arguments for emptiness, such as the *Mulaprajña*, which formed the basis for the Madhyamaka tradition.

Naropa (956–1140) Indian mahasiddha and a pandita at Nalanda University. He was a principal student of Tilopa and transmitted what became the essential Kagyu instructions to Marpa.

nirmanakaya See **kayas, three.**

nirvana (*mya ngan las 'das pa*) The Sanskrit literally means "extinguished"; the Tibetan translation means "transcendence of suffering." It is liberation from samsara into a state of quiescent peace, though the Mahayana teaches an inseparability of samsara and nirvana, also called "the great nirvana" in which there is a continued activity that benefits beings.

Prajñaparamita (*shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa*) The sixth paramita, the perfection of wisdom. The Prajñaparamita sutras expound the doctrine of emptiness and are classed as the second turning of the wheel of Dharma.

Pramana (*tshad ma*) The teachings of Buddhist epistemology and logic.

pratyekabuddha (*rang sangs rgyas*) Hinayana practitioners who attain the Hinayana realization entirely through their own unguided contemplation at a time when the teachings do not exist in the world.

provisional meaning (*drang don*) Teachings on relative topics that require interpretation. Compare **definitive meaning.**

Rangjung Dorje (1284–1339) The Third Karmapa, an important systematizer and author of the early Karma Kagyu corpus of teachings. He is the author of *A Treatise on Buddha Nature.*

Rangtong (*rang stong*) "Self-empty." One of the two main interpretations of the Middle Way. In contrast to the Shentong view, the Rangtong view emphasizes the empty nature of all phenomena and their lack of inherent existence.

relative truth See **truths, two.**

rupakaya See **kayas, three.**

sambhogakaya See **kayas, three.**

samsara (*'khor ba*) The cycle of death and rebirth characterized by ignorance and suffering.

Saraha One of the Indian mahasiddhas, Saraha was a high-caste brahmin who is said to have gone to live with a low-caste arrow maker as his consort. He composed the dohas of the king, the queen, and the people. Saraha is the first human teacher of the Mahamudra lineage, having received it in a vision from Matiratna, a bodhisattva in the entourage of the primordial buddha Vajradhara.

Shakyamuni Buddha (c. 490–410 B.C.E.) The historical Buddha.

The dates of his lifetime have been subject to successive revisions, the latest findings pointing to a life entirely within the fifth century B.C.E.

shamatha (*zhi gnas*) Tranquillity meditation.

Shantideva (c. 685–763) A principal exponent of the Madhyamaka school. He was the author of the *Bodhicharyavatara (Entering the Bodhisattva's Way of Life).*

shastra (*bstan bcos*) A treatise or commentary by a later master on the teachings of the Buddha.

Shentong (*zhen stong*) "Empty of others." One of the two main interpretations of the Middle Way. In contrast to the Rangtong view, the Shentong view emphasizes the luminous aspect of the mind.

shravaka (*nyan thos*) Literally, disciple. A Hinayana practitioner who follows the teachings of the Buddha.

siddha See **mahasiddha.**

siddhi (*dngos grub*) Spiritual accomplishment. Siddhis are of two types, general or ultimate. General siddhis are supernormal powers such as clairvoyance. Ultimate siddhi is complete enlightenment.

Six Yogas of Naropa (*naro chos drug*) The contents of the list of six has varied considerably. The present-day version has the practices of chandali (inner heat), illusory body, dream, clear light, bardo, and the ejection of consciousness.

skandhas See **aggregates, five.**

sugata (*bde gshegs pa*) Literally, one who has gone to bliss. A title given to the buddhas.

sugatagarbha (*bde gshegs nying po*) Literally, essence of one who has gone to bliss. See **buddha nature.**

sutras (*mdo*) The discourses of Shakyamuni Buddha that comprise the teachings of the Hinayana and Mahayana, in distinction to the tantras, which contain the Vajrayana teachings.

tantras (*rgyud*) The texts of the Vajrayana. In the Kagyu tradition they are classified into four levels: kriya, charya, yoga, and niruttara (or anuttara) yoga tantras.

tathagata (*de bzhin gshegs pa*) Literally, one who has gone thus. A title given to the buddhas.

tathagatagarbha (*de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po*) Literally, essence of one who has gone thus. See **buddha nature.**

Three Jewels (*dkon mchog gsum;* Skt. *Triratna*) The Buddha (*sangs rgyas*), the Dharma (*chos*), and the Sangha (*dge 'dun*).

Tilopa (928–1009) Bengali mahasiddha whose teachings are the origin of the Tibetan Kagyu lineage. Tilopa was the teacher of Naropa.

tirthika (*mu stegs pa*) One who belongs to a non-Buddhist tradition holding a view of eternalism or nihilism.

truths, two The Mahayana teaching on the inseparability of emptiness and appearance. Ultimate truth, or absolute truth, is the empty nature of phenomena. Relative truth, or conventional reality, is the unceasing arising of phenomena.

Tsong Khapa (1357–1419) Tibetan scholar and founder of the Gelugpa lineage.

ultimate truth See **truths, two.**

Vajrayana (*rdo rje'i theg pa*) Literally, the Way of the Thunderbolt. The Vajrayana teaches skillful means that bring a swift result. Also called Mantrayana because of its use of mantras in the context of deity visualization.

vayu See **nadi, vayu, and bindu.**

vipashyana (*lhag mthong*) Meditation that develops insight into the nature of the mind; also, the realization attained through insight meditation.

wisdom of the nature of phenomena (*ji snyed pa'i mkhyen pa*) One

of the two wisdoms of the Buddha; the wisdom that sees the true nature of reality.

wisdom of the variety of phenomena (*ji lta ba'i mkhyen pa*) One of the two wisdoms of the Buddha; the wisdom that sees all the aspects of relative phenomena.

yidam (*yi dam*) "The deity of one's mental commitment." A meditation deity visualized in Vajrayana practice. The yidam embodies particular aspects of enlightened mind.

INDEX

Buddhism

"Thrangu Rinpoche explains the aspects of impermanence, permanence, temporality, and the eternal nature of the three kayas with great clarity and alacrity, showing readers the practical implications of these otherwise rarefied Buddhist concepts."
—Venerable Traleg Kyabgon, author of *The Essence of Buddhism* and *Mind at Ease*

"This treatise is important for understanding the development of Tibetan Mahamudra teachings in their emphasis on emptiness, the true nature of mind, and the importance of meditation in coming to realize emptiness."
—*Publishers Weekly*

"Khenchen Thrangu's work is distinctive because of the clarity and vividness of his religious thought."
—*Library Journal*

A Treatise on Buddha Nature by Rangjung Dorje, the third Karmapa, is one of the Kagyu lineage's oldest and most important texts, belonging to the tradition of the Six Yogas of Naropa. In the nineteenth century Jamgön Kongtrul composed a commentary to it, which Khenchen Thrangu uses as the basis for the teachings in this book.

The subject of this famous treatise is buddha essence, the basic nature of all beings. The term is a translation of the Sanskrit *tathagatagarbha*, or *deshek nyingpo* (bde-gshegs snying-po) in Tibetan. The Tibetan interprets *garbha* as "essence" (snying-po), the innermost part of something. Both terms indicate that our very nature is buddhahood—buddha essence is possessed not only by enlightened masters, but by everyone.

The path to awakening buddha essence, or buddha nature, is meditation. The practitioner needs to understand not only how to meditate, but also the reasons for meditation, in order to develop insight. This text contains complete instructions on how to discover buddha essence in ourselves.



Born in Tibet in 1933, Khenchen Thrangu is one of the foremost teachers of the Kagyu lineage of Tibetan Buddhism and is the tutor of the seventeenth Karmapa. He travels and teaches extensively around the world.

Printed in U.S.A.

www.shambhala.com



Shambhala
Boston & London



US $16.95 CAN $22.95